

THE LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

[ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.]

No. 1505.—VOL. LVIII.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING MARCH 5, 1892.

[Price One Penny.]



[SLOWLY, AND LIKE A CHILD REPEATING A LESSON, SYBIL REPEATED THOSE FALSE AND CRUEL WORDS!]

THE PRETTIEST GIRL IN DRAYTON.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

"By Jove, Ryland! she is the prettiest girl in Drayton; and the neatest!"

"High praise, Charteris; and what are her people?"

"That I cannot say. She herself is governess at the High School. Our vicar started that, and, of course, appointed the principal himself. She has proved herself very efficient, and the school is well patronised by the tradespeople here. She lives with the Sidneys, and, of course, that fact alone materially improves her social position. I don't think the Vicarage folks would visit any house where Miss Wyvern was not received as an honoured guest."

"Then she is not only the prettiest and

neatest, but the luckiest girl in Drayton too," laughed Rupert Ryland. "She is to be envied. And what is this enchantress's name?—disappointing, I suppose?"

"I think not; but it is decidedly quaint, I should say pretty—Amoret."

"It has the delicious smack of old-world romance," said Rupert. "I approve it."

"Miss Wyvern is your debtor," laughed Basil Charteris, "for there never was a more fastidious fellow about women than yourself. Look here, old man; you'll probably hear some very nasty things said about the girl, because the women here don't consider her their equal, and are jealous of her beauty and charming manner."

"I suppose you are speaking of Miss Wyvern?" interrupted a soft voice, and there in the doorway stood a tall, slender girl, with a coronet of sunny hair, and a face of such classic beauty that it was a pleasure to look upon it.

Basil Charteris flushed a trifle vexedly, his sister did not share his worship of Miss Wyvern, but Rupert said, with a smile,—

"You must possess the power of civination,

Miss Sybil. Pray come in and let me hear you endorse Basil's opinion."

With a pretty, low laugh, Miss Charteris entered, and seating herself by the table, folded her slender hands loosely in her lap before she made answer.

"Miss Wyvern is undoubtedly pretty, and her manner is charming. It puzzles me how she could acquire such grace and ease, they are wonderful in a girl of her position. All the young men of Drayton, and some old ones, who should be wiser, are ready to fall down and worship her. But—"

"I knew," interrupted Basil, *sotto voce*, "there would be a 'but' in the case."

"Poor Basil!" laughed Miss Charteris. "How fierce you are in behalf of your divinity. As I was about to remark, Mr. Ryland, there is some ground for complaint against Miss Wyvern. She is an ardent coquette!"

"She is nothing of the kind," broke in Basil, sharply. "I told you, Rupert, not to take for granted anything the women folk say of Amoret Wyvern."

Sybil smiled, pliably; then addressing their guest, asked,—



"Do you know Congreve's little poem 'A Coquette'?" curiously enough that ideal creature is Amoret, too, and Miss Wyvern has all her attributes."

"I don't know the lines in question. What are they?"

"If I give you the second and fourth verses, you will have a very just idea of the young lady's character. Basil, you need not frown so terribly. We cannot all blind ourselves to certain little defects as you have done. Here are the verses, Mr. Ryland:—

"Coquet and coy at once her air,
Both studied though both seem neglected;
Careless she is with artful care,
Affecting to be unaffected.
* * * * *

"She likes herself, yet others hates
For that in herself she prizes;
And while she laughs at them, forgets
She is the thing which she despises."

"Trust a woman to speak ill of a woman," snapped Basil Charteris, rising hurriedly, and quitting the room.

His sister turned to Rupert with a pretty gesture of compassion.

"Poor old Basil," she said, "that girl has fairly bewitched him; and I am quite afraid you will think me very unkind to speak as I have done of Amoret. The truth of the matter is, I wanted to disconcert my brother, because Amoret has not the slightest affection for him, and he cannot trust to her mercy. Perhaps, too, you will wonder that feeling thus I am still her friend; but I cannot help myself. When I am away from her I can see her faults so plainly. When I am with her she dominates my will, and fascinates me until I am ready to take up cudgels in her defense if need arose. But you will see her yourself this afternoon, and form your own judgment. Of course the Laytons' is ostensibly a tennis party, but Amoret won't play, she never does. She prefers sitting in the shade 'to romping like a hoyden,' as she forcibly expresses it!"

"I am on the qui vive to see this lady who unites Helen and Cleopatra in herself," laughed Rupert; "but having been made acquainted with her foible, I am neither prepared to admire or esteem her."

"That is too bad," said Sybil, regretfully. "I wish I had not spoken so freely; but you are such an old friend, I allowed my tongue too great a license. Try to forget my words, and remember only that Amoret is my friend. It won't be hard to do so when you know her."

Rupert smiled incredulously.

"There is no more detestable creature under the sun than an unscrupulous coquette," he said. "I am not prepared to find an interest in studying Miss Wyvern. We should certainly be antagonistic."

"Wait until you have seen her," smiled Sybil, "you will think so differently then; and now, if you please, will you come to luncheon. I heard the bell quite two minutes ago."

Side by side they went, and in his heart Rupert was questioning would it not be well to make this tall, beautiful girl his wife, mistress of his home? She was exquisite in her youth and loveliness, her antecedents were irreproachable, and he thought she was not quite indifferent to him. He half resolved to put his fate to the test that day.

Sybil was amiable and kind. He had never loved any woman; but it did not seem a hard matter to him to grow actually fond of this golden-haired beauty, and he was tired of his bachelor existence. He would like to take up residence in the dear old place where he had been born and reared.

Perhaps to-night he would speak. So he reflected as he drove with the Charterises to Mrs. Leyton's tennis party.

He looked round somewhat curiously for Miss Wyvern, but she had not arrived; in fact she came much later, in company with the Reverend and Mrs. Sidney, and, as Sybil had said, she declined to play. Still later, Mr. Leyton introduced him to her.

"Yes," he decided, mentally, as he took the vacant chair beside her, "she is a pretty girl; but I don't see why all Drayton raves of her. Sybil Charteris has infinitely more beauty and style."

But when she answered his conventional speech, he reversed his opinion.

The smile which brightened the sweet grey eyes, which curved the red lips, had a peculiar charm for him, and the gracious friendliness of her manner, with its quaint touch of dignity, was beyond resistance.

She was not actually beautiful, but, when animated, her face was the most fascinating he had ever seen.

The brow was broad and low, just shaded by little rings of dark brown hair, the nose straight and delicate; the upper lip was short, the lower a little pointing, as though it invited kindness and caresses; the chin was just a trifle too square for absolute beauty, but it boasted the most adorable simile, and in the soft, rose-tinted cheeks little dimples came and went to the utter distraction of the masculine mind.

"You have been playing?" she said, with a glance at Rupert's somewhat flushed face, and her voice was so low and sweet, one could not imagine it uttering harsh words. "I suppose, like my good friends here, you will consider me quite an eccentric when I say I am absolutely ignorant even of the rules of tennis, and that I hate it?"

"If you are quite ignorant of the game," he answered, smiling, "are you competent to judge whether or no you like it?"

"Yes, I think so. I consider it too feminine for men; too masculine for women."

"Then you would taboo it altogether? Is not that rather arbitrary, Miss Wyvern?"

"Oh! let each one please himself; but, I confess, I would like the whole thing abolished," and as she lifted her eyes to his, their beauty was dangerous. "I am keeping you," she added, quickly; "pray do not let me spoil your afternoon. I like watching the people."

"And criticizing them?" he questioned. "No, Miss Wyvern, with your permission, I will remain here. I don't wish you to consider me effeminate," with a mischievous gleam in his eyes, "and really I am surfeited with tennis."

"Look at Sybil Charteris," said Amoret, "is she not lovely? I am often tempted to envy her beauty and her grace."

The young man glanced quickly at her. Was she seeking a compliment? No, the sweet sincerity of her face convinced him she had no idea of doing so; and before he could reflect, he answered, swiftly,—

"Are you unconscious of your own claims both to beauty and grace, that you need envy Sybil?"

She looked at him with wide, surprised eyes; then she said, with just an infusion of coldness in her tones,—

"Miss Charteris is the loveliest girl I know; and, if you please, Mr. Ryland, I detect unmeaning compliments."

Then Sybil's quotation came back to him, "Coquet and coy at once her air," and he doubted her truth. So, with a hasty apology, he spoke of other things; yet he was a trifle abashed when Basil joined them.

Watching Amoret, he found no trace of coquetry in her manner towards his friend, but all the while those words rang in his head:

"Careless she is with artful care,
Affecting to be unaffected."

"I know you don't play," said Basil, leaning towards her, "will you let me show you Mrs. Leyton's roses? they are at their best now. Ryland, you will come?"

"Thanks, no; I see Germany over there, and I want to speak with him about the forthcoming match," and then as Amoret went away with her sworn cavalier he glanced after them a little strangely.

"By Jove! she has the power of moving

one against one's will, and the puzzle is how she does it. If she is a coquette she has the apparent innocence of a child; and if she is not a coquette, she is doubly dangerous to a man's peace of mind."

CHAPTER II.

"Miss Wyvern, I have brought the book I promised you; it is unique!"

The girl glanced up, a faint flush staining her cheeks. "You are very good to me, Mr. Ryland, and in no way can I repay you. I must always remain in your debt."

"You will not find me a hard creditor," answered Rupert, seating himself beside her. "I am not of the Jewish persuasion."

"You need not be a Jew to lose all instincts of compassion; there are plenty of money-lenders of our own race who insist upon their pound of flesh." and the wonderful eyes, looking frankly into his, stirred his every pulse. It was as Sybil said; when with her, he could do no less than trust her; when away, he wondered which was her true character, that the ladies of Drayton delighted to give her, or that which Basil had painted in glowing words to him. But the girl was speaking, and he could only listen to her words —

"You must fancy me excessively idle, Mr. Ryland; I think you have always seen me either reading or dreaming; even Mrs. Sidney says that occasionally I am the very genius of indolence; but it is hard," with a pretty smile, "to be unjustly accused, so I wish you to understand that ordinarily I am a very industrious body — this is my reason of *dolce far niente* — my dog wished for summer holiday."

"I wonder," said Rupert, bluntly, "you do not prefer to spend it with your friends."

Her face changed instantly; all the brightness went from it, and her eyes shadowed.

"I have no friends," she said, and the ring of pain in her voice affected him strangely.

"Not a friend in all the world?" he questioned pitifully. "Are you quite alone, Miss Wyvern?"

"I am quite alone; I have relatives, but you who know the world should know, too, that one's best friends are rarely to be found in one's own family. I have not found them there." Then she looked up, smiling a little scornfully at the half-puzzled, half-doubting look on Rupert's face.

"I can guess what you are thinking," she said, brightly: "you are saying to yourself, 'This is a very ill regulated young woman, or her relatives would not have cast her utterly adrift,' which is precisely what they did. Oh! I know just what half Drayton says of me—but I don't care—ah, yes, I do!" and her voice sank suddenly: "it hurts me often; sometimes I think I must go away in search of a place where charity is known and exercised; and then I doubt if I should be happier, or if folks would be kinder; and I grow a little cynical, a little hard, enveloping myself in a panoply of sarcasm—or—or assumed indifference." She panted then as though unable to proceed, and Rupert thought her eyes were filled with tears.

He half stretched out his hand to take hers so idly folded in her lap; then Sybil's words came again to him, and he sat silent and irresponsive beside this girl, who could move him at her will.

His silence acted upon her as a tonic. Springing to her feet, she said, with a soft, gay laugh—

"How stagey I was getting! It is a fault of mine. I have to act so many parts that I scarcely even know when I am natural. I have lost my own identity. Mr. Ryland, you must forget what I have said, and let me show you our very wonderful lotus lily. It is in full bloom now, and affords a sight to make glad the heart of man."

In an almost angry frame of mind, he crossed the level lawn with her, and just by

the hot house Basil met them. He looked flushed and vexed.

"I did not expect to find you here, Ryland," he said, crossly. "I thought you were off to Woodleigh?"

"I intended going there, but remembering I had promised Miss Wyvern the loan of 'Cherry Rips' I came up here instead. The day is too hot for walking any distance."

"Then you'll be broiled in this house. It is like a furnace."

"Don't dissuade Mr. Ryland to venture in," smiled Amoret, "I have promised him a great treat. If you are very good you may come too," and she opened the door, bidding them enter.

The loveliest blossoms were all around, but the young men scarcely stayed even to admire the lawn plant. On this July morning the heat was almost insufferable; so with a laugh Amoret led the way to the fernery, which was a trifle less sultry and suffocating.

Here she arranged two minute bouquets, presenting one to each of her companions. Basil fastened his in his lapel with a pleased look, but Rupert laid his aside a little hastily.

"A favour is no longer a favour," he said, frowning, "when it is bestowed on the multitude!"

Basil was in advance, and the girl turned her startled face quickly towards the speaker.

"What do you mean, Mr. Ryland?" she demanded, with a touch of hauteur in her voice.

"That I value no favour that is not 'savoir à la générale.' Your gift is worthless, because Charteris holds its counterpart, is equally the recipient of your kindness!"

The colour flamed into her cheeks; but she had no chance to reply, as Basil had retraced his steps to meet them; but the look she cast at Rupert was so eloquent that he half repented his action, and wished his words unspoken.

"Miss Wyvern," said Basil, gaily, cheered beyond measure by her kind manner, "see what a Goth Ryland is! He has actually lost his bouquet already. As for me," and his voice sank to a whisper, "I will keep mine always in memory of you."

A vexed look crossed her face.

"Keep it so long as its beauty remains," she said, audibly, and allowed him no further chance for speech.

Returning to the lawn they found Mrs. Sidney seated at a small table, on which a maid was arranging delicate cups and saucers. "You will have tea?" she said, pleasantly. "It is cool under our limes and fragrant. Just now they are at their best."

So the young men stayed, but Amoret was unusually quiet. She was vexed with the conduct of both, and her cheeks burned when she remembered how Rupert had slighted her gift.

She had given it out of sheer friendliness, and he had not only refused to wear it, but had plainly shown how little he esteemed her. His foolish speech could certainly bear no other interpretation, so the girl thought; and when they had gone she turned passionately to her dear old friend.

"I wish I might never see them again," she said; "they would make me the amusement of their idle hours, if they could, if they dared," and her great grey eyes flashed indignantly.

* * * * *

The evening proved sultry, and Mrs. Sidney, complaining of a headache, lay upon a couch in the drawing room.

The Vicar was away from home, and left to her own resources, Amoret wandered through the garden, down to the little low gate which lay half hidden under its garland of jasmine and roses.

Presently she heard the low rumble of thunder, and a vivid flash of lightning lit up all the heavens; but Amoret had no fear of the elements, and stayed at her post, rather enjoying than dreading the advent of the storm.

And as she stood there, the sound of hasty steps smote on her ear, and then close by her she saw Rupert Ryland.

She met his glance with a coldness altogether foreign to her usual self, and would not see the hand he offered.

"We are going to have a heavy storm," she said in greeting; "you would be wise to hasten back to your friends."

"I have but just left them," he answered, quickly; "I came with the intention of seeing you, and to apologize for my brutal conduct this afternoon. I don't care a fig about the storm, but I care a great deal about your anger—I know I deserve it."

She interrupted him quickly, with more than a suspicion of hauteur in her voice,—

"Please say no more; the matter is too trivial for discussion, let it pass."

"But I cannot. I behaved like an unmitigated pig—I see that now."

"Your conduct was not distinguished by courtesy," and here a little ripple of fun was heard in her voice, for Amoret's anger was never long-lived. "Still, Rupert must not go wholly unpunished." "I own that I was considerably vexed; but you need not fear a repetition of my error, Mr. Ryland."

He leaned over the gate, looking eagerly at her.

"If you forgive me, you will prove it by giving me the flowers you now are wearing, Miss Wyvern."

"No," with indignation in eyes and tone. "I should never respect myself again if I did; and the words you used, though forgiven, are not forgotten. Under the circumstances, I consider you most presumptuous."

The flash of lightning which lit up all the scene showed his flushed and frowning face.

"You are less merciful than I hoped and believed, but I suppose you are just; only you might have some faith in my regret. I should not be here to-night if I did not feel I had transgressed sorely, and wished to make amends."

There was some touch of pain in his voice, and Amoret was so easily moved to pity, and this very trait was often misconstrued, she put out one little hand to him with a quick impulsive gesture, saying, with the prettiest smile,—

"I believe I have been very disagreeable; perhaps it is the weather to blame, it has been so oppressive all day; but I accept your apology. And, if you please, we will not refer to our stupid difference again. There is the first spot of rain—it will pour, soon and you will get drenched. Say goodnight and go."

"I shall be drenched before I reach the Charteris' place. Miss Wyvern, the Sidneys have a reputation of hospitality to sustain; do you think I might go in?"

She laughed softly, in an amused fashion.

"You plead in such a pathetic voice, that I will venture to admit you. And—oh! what a deluge! You must run if you would not be drowned," for suddenly the rain came down in torrents, and, before Rupert had time to reply, his companion had caught up her skirts and was flying like a bird across the lawn.

She reached the house first, and as he entered the hall, she turned her flushed, bright face towards him; she was breathless with the haste she had made, and her pretty hair, which was bedewed with sparkling drops of rain, was in the most distracting state of dishevelment; but Rupert thought he had never seen her look so bewitching.

"You ought to be called Atalanta," he said, laughing, "you are so fleet of foot; and I imagined, from all previous knowledge of you, that haste was not your forte."

She tossed back the falling tresses, smiling at him from beneath the curlis about her brow.

"I am a creature of many moods," she said, gaily, "and I think it pleases me sometimes to puzzle folks. But now let me take you to Mrs. Sidney;" and having

announced the visitor, she went away to brush up the fallen hair. When she returned, he was chattering gaily with Mrs. Sidney, and both seemed quite forgetful of the storm outside.

"How fortunate," said Amoret, "that Mr. Sidney is not returning to-night; it is hateful to travel through such weather," and walking towards a window, she stood looking out.

Presently, Rupert joined her.

"What report have you to give?"

"Oh, the rain still falls in torrents, but the storm is subsiding. Don't you see how distant and faint the lightning is, and the thunder sounds indistinct? I suspect that Mrs. Charteris will be very anxious about you."

"Is that a hint for me to take my leave?" he asked, bluntly. "And in such a rain?"

"Oh, nothing of the kind; I am not quite so stony-hearted," laughing. "And, again, I am not your hostess. Mrs. Sidney would not turn a tramp from the door to-night."

"I am grateful to be allowed a tramp's privilege," the young man said, smiling, "and I intend to make the most of it. I have heard, Miss Wyvern, you sing exquisitely, and I am bold enough to ask you to sing to me."

"Not to-night," the girl answered, reluctantly. "I must beg you to excuse me."

"Mrs. Sidney, I beg you to use your powers of persuasion in my behalf."

"Sing 'Ora pro nobis,' Amoret—only that," urged the Vicar's wife; but the other shook her head.

"I shall not go from my first decision," and each knew it was vain to press her further.

And when, the rain having abated, Rupert reluctantly, took his leave, Mrs. Sidney asked, —

"Why were you so unwilling to sing?"

"Because he did not deserve. I should grant him any favour; because I would not do much as seem to wish to please. I remember a certain injunction, 'Abstain from all appearance of evil,' and I abstained," with a mocking little laugh. "Aren't you going to command me for my praiseworthy conduct?"

"I never shall command you whilst you are not your own kind and natural self. Dear child, surely you can afford to smile at the petty malice of the Draytonians."

"The little insects sting," said Amoret, as she took up her candle, "and their sting remains the longest."

CHAPTER III.

"It's of no use, Sybil," said Basil, dejectedly. "I did as you advised, and asked her outright to marry me, and she answered no; she would not even tell me I might hope. I don't believe I ever had a chance with her at all!"

Sybil Charteris was unnaturally pale, but her voice was quite steady when she spoke.

"You are too easily cast down. If Amoret said no to-day, she may probably say yes tomorrow. She cannot be utterly blind to the advantages of a marriage with you. I know neither regards such an alliance with horror, but father is easy to move, and your lady-love is a particular favourite with him. Try again; faint heart—"

"Don't use that hackneyed saw to me," Basil cried, savagely. "I tell you it's of no use subjecting myself to further humiliation. Amoret plainly told me she did not care for me!"

"Then she is the coquette I have always believed her," said Sybil, in a breathless way.

"She openly encouraged your suit until Mr. Ryland appeared on the scene; and I, fool that I am, told her what a splendid rent-roll, what a position he held in the county. He is always dancing attendance upon her. Can't

you guess the sequel? I wish he had never known her!"

"I wish he had never come here," Basil railed. "I never guessed how it would be; I never thought for a moment she would make an impression upon him. I used to believe he cared a great deal for you."

"Don't!" the girl said, with a gesture of pain, "there are some things I cannot bear. And, Basil, he must not marry her; if I can win her for you, you shall yet call her wife. I will help you, for my own sake as well as for yours."

He took and clasped her hands.

"You're a brick, Sybil; and I don't know how to thank you. I never thought, poor old girl! how far matters had gone with you; and, Syb, I have only one condition to make with you. You will use none but fair means to accomplish your end. We won't have treachery in the camp."

Miss Charteris flushed slightly.

"If you suspect me of evil motives, I will have nothing to do with the matter. You may seek another ally!"

"No, no, Sybil; you are too hasty; and I was never good at framing speeches—only I thought that you have never been fond of Amoret, and—and—"

"And that I would be glad to do her an injury? I am obliged to you for your good opinion; and yet all along you have been mistaken. See here, Basil, I am more fond of that girl than you would readily conceive; but I never have trusted her, and I never can. I wish your choice had fallen upon some other woman; but wishes are vain, and as you never will be satisfied until you call her yours, I will help you in your cause; and when matrimony has made you wiser, do not blame me for your misery."

"I am willing to risk the misery; and Sybil, I am sorry I hurt your feelings!"

Bat Sybil was gone.

She went slowly up to her room and dressing carefully walked towards the school, for the vacation was now ended and Amoret had returned to her duties. When she reached the gates the scholars were swarming out like bees; and having learned from them that Miss Wyvern was quite alone, she went in. The governess looked up from a pile of exercises with a welcoming smile.

"How kind of you to come, dear Sybil! Can you wait a short time? I shall soon be finished here, and then we can walk to the Vicarage together. Amuse yourself with this novel in the meanwhile."

"Thank you, I would rather watch you; you are just too quaint with that air of scholarly wisdom upon you," answered Sybil, smiling; but she was very pale, and her eyes had a weary look in them which touched Amoret to compassion.

"You are not well, and this room is too hot for you," she said. "See, I will leave my work—all for your sake, you poor darling—and we will go at once."

"No, Amoret; I would rather stay here, and indeed I am quite well, but I have been excessively grieved this morning, and I felt I must tell you all—that indeed you had a right to know the truth. Finish your task and then listen to me."

"I will listen first, if you please," resolutely. "What is it I should know?"

Sybil reached out and took her hand kindly.

"Tell me first," she said. "Is it quite impossible you could care for Basil? Think how dearly and how long he has loved you; and he does not wish to hurry you into marriage—he will wait."

"It," said Amoret, interrupting the flow of words, "if he waited a century my answer would be still the same. I do not regard him as a woman should regard her chosen husband."

"But in time you might even learn that lesson. Basil is so kind and asks so little of you. Amoret, do not lightly cast aside the

treasure he offers for the sake of one who is all unworthy you!"

"What do you mean?" questioned the girl, her face a trifle paler than before.

"That I am afraid you have allowed Mr. Ryland to estrange your affection from my poor brother—Do not take your hand away! remember, I come to you as your friend, that it is your happiness I seek; and to be kind I must first be cruel."

With her free hand Amoret covered her face.

"Go on," she said, in a hard voice, "let me learn everything; it is only suspense that kills."

"You poor child! I have been afraid for you all along, because any girl, however devoid of vanity, could only construe Mr. Ryland's attentions to you one way; and, oh! Amoret, he meant nothing all the while! It was this morning I learned the shameful truth from his own lips. He made a jest of Basil's love, infatuation he called it, for you, and when I spoke boldly, saying that he himself appeared not indifferent to you, he laughed heartily. 'Miss Wyvern, is awfully good fun,' he said, 'just the sort of girl to amuse an idle fellow, but not the sort he would wish to marry; and when I take a wife she shall be my equal socially.' Oh, Amoret, it is too cruel for you to bear! I almost wish I had not spoken, but I could not bear to think such a man should make you the subject of such unseemly gossip—and," regretfully, "I had always so esteemed him."

Amoret snatched her hand from the other's hold, and showed her face blank and white, her eyes dark with unutterable shame and pain.

"If there is more to hear," she said, harshly, "let me hear it now, I am not a coward;" but she shivered in every limb, and her heart was full of bitterest anguish.

"There is nothing more to tell. I have repeated too much already. My dear, what can I say to comfort you, knowing how bitter this blow must be to you?"

Amoret stood up, her hands pressed hard upon her temples.

"Say nothing! there is no help or consolation in speech, and I can endure even this; but Sybil—oh, Sybil, you will believe that by every wile he tried to win my heart, so that I need feel no shame in giving him my whole affection; but I shall crush it out. Oh, yes, I shall crush it out! and you, because you love me, will keep my secret inviolate. Oh! how shall I make him understand he is not, and never can be anything to me?"

"You can marry Basil," suggested his sister.

Amoret shuddered.

"Do not tempt me," she pleaded, "women have done things in moments of pique which they have regretted all through their lives. I don't wish to swell the number of unhappy ones. No, Sybil, by my own strength I will conquer my foolish fancy; and indeed, indeed I thank you for all your goodness to me. And now, dear, I should like to be alone. No, no, I can't go to the Vicarage just now; I have not yet learned to wear my mask easily, and you, in your love for me, will not be angry that I send you away."

Sybil bent and kissed her, murmuring a few kind words, and then she went away, and one more Amoret was alone.

She sat down by her desk, and covering her eyes with her hands fought long and fiercely for self-control; nor did she look up until the victory was complete.

But her very conquest had robbed her eyes of much sweetness, had stolen something of gentleness from her young face.

She sat all that afternoon in school, strictly performing all her duties, although her head ached and her heart was heavy within her breast; and when all the scholars had gone, she dressed with her usual care and walked homewards.

Mrs. Sidney met her on the lawn.

"My dear, you are looking woefully ill, and

Hannah tells me you refused to join the very recherché luncheon I myself prepared for you."

"How foolish of Hannah so to worry you! And did you really prepare it? Oh, then, I am doubly sorry I sent it back untouched. But I have one of my terrible headaches, and nothing will cure it but rest. Will you be very angry if I go to my room?"

Mrs. Sidney met the girl's smile with a compassionate look.

"Go," she said, "and I will take care you are not disturbed. Poor child, you are quite unfitted for your present mode of life;" and kissing her gently, she permitted her to go.

But the girl found no rest. She stood erect before her window, her face all drawn and white, her eyes heavy with woe, which could find no relief in tears, her slim hands clenched in the folds of her pretty blue gown, and her white teeth pressed hard upon the nether lip.

"I am awfully good fun," she mused, "just the sort of girl to amuse an idle fellow! but not the sort he would wish to marry. Oh, I would rather die now than share his fortunes. Awfully good fun! Mr. Ryland, I am sport for you no longer;" and then a sob rose to her lips, a sob of such utter despair that it gave voice to a heart's whole anguish. "Help me to bear this blow, dear Heaven, help me!" she prayed, dumbly, "give me strength to hide my pain from all."

The sweet dusk evening came. A servant brought her tea and biscuits. The latter she refused—she could not eat, food would choke her now. Quite late at night Mrs. Sidney invaded her room.

"Are you not in bed, dear child? and why have you no light?"

"I preferred darkness, light aggravates my headache, and I will go to bed presently; but the night is so beautiful that I forgot to be sleepy."

"But you must remember to-morrow's work!"

"I have not forgotten it, and shall be quite ready for it. Good night, dear Mrs. Sidney, do not be troubled on my account."

Then, finding herself once more alone, she shut and locked her door against all intruders; but not that night did sleep visit her weary eyes.

In the morning she changed her gown, doing all she could to remove traces of agitation from her face, and succeeding beyond her highest expectations; then, having made a pretence of breakfasting, she started for school.

None of the scholars perceived any difference in her manner. They were met by the old kindly smile, a little weary it is true, the old kindly words, and no one guessed what lay hidden in the heart of "the prettiest girl in Drayton."

Punctually at twelve she closed school, making her way slowly homewards, and when but half her journey was accomplished she was overtaken by Rupert Ryland.

"Miss Wyvern, I am forsaken at last. It is two whole days since we met, and I began to think you had purposely hidden yourself from us all. I suppose that hateful school has taught you forgetfulness of friends, you looked quite stern when I chanced upon you."

The small face was pale, the eyes unnaturally dark, as she answered, lightly,—

"The 'hateful school' means independence to me; it ought to have my first and best thoughts."

"No," he remonstrated; "you must disabuse your mind of that idea; friends are first."

She laughed, mockingly.

"Friends are so apt to fail one in time of need. Good-bye."

"Not good-bye; I am walking your way, and I do not know you in this mood."

"I think you never have known me," she answered; "at best we are but casual acquaintances."

His face changed as she spoke.

March 5, 1892.

the very
red for
erry you!
then, I
nd. But
es, and
you be
with a
are you
re quite
life;"
l her to
od erect
wn and
h could
launched
and her
her lip.
," just
owl but
Oh, I
runes.
a sport
rose to
that it
"Help
me!"
tugh to
servant
she
choke
ney in-
d why
es my
; but
o to be
arrow's
quite
sidney,
e, she
anders;
weary
doing
itation
d her
ade a
d for
differ-
by the
e, the
at lay
irl in
school,
when
she
e. It
began
self
ll has
oked
un-
-ence
best
dis-
are
e of
way,
she
int-

"If we remain 'casual acquaintances' the fault is yours. Let me be something more to you; let me be your friend, your—"

"I do not believe in platonic friendships—they rarely exist save in romance."

There was something so strange and hard in her manner, that Rupert was rapidly growing angry. Only two days ago she had been so kind and gentle; was it true, oh! was it true that she was a coquette at heart, and had wearied of him as she had wearied of others?

"You are a different creature since Tuesday," he said, "what have I done to offend you?"

"You have done nothing," coldly. "I am only tired and in haste to get home."

"I will not detain you," he retorted, sharply, "but you are not usually so sharp of speech."

She faced him a moment with bright eyes.

"No, my fault has been that I have made amusement for others. I must 'mend my manners,' as the children say; and turning on her heel, she left him to ponder over her words.

The next few days passed miserably enough both for Rupert and Amoret; then came the Fancy Fair—the great annual event at Drayton.

Amoret assisted Mrs. Sidney at her stall, and looked the daintiest shepherdess imaginable in her dress of pink and bronze green. It was particularly evident that she formed the staple attraction of the Fair to most of the gilded youths of the little town.

Sybil, beautiful and stately, felt a throb of envy stir her heart as Rupert Ryland made his way to the stall.

He hoped that the girl would be kinder to him than at their last meeting. She had grown so dear to him—so dear! It was worse than death itself to know she was what they called her so often—"a heartless coquette."

She was chattering gaily to a young fellow he knew, and there was no hint or trace of sorrow on the bright face she turned upon Rupert.

"You are good to patronise our Fair, for it must seem awfully tame to you after your wide experience of such things," she said, lightly; "and what may I hope to sell you?"

The young fellow moved away; they two were, to all intents and purposes, alone.

"Mount me bouquet as near like the one I so foolishly rejected as you possibly can."

Her face changed from red to white, from white to red; then she said, frigidly,—

"I thought that incident was forgotten, as I have forgotten the flowers I offered."

"Shall I tell you what they were? Amoret, what has changed you?" and for the life of him he could not keep the passion out of his voice.

She heard it, but she distrusted him the more. What a clever hypocrite, what a consummate actor he was! And she hardened her heart against him as she answered,—

"You presume too far, Mr. Ryland. Only to my friends am I Amoret, and although I may be 'awfully good fun,' I am not quite devoid of self-respect."

"What on earth do you mean?" he asked, quickly. "I declare I am at a loss to know."

She smiled incredulously.

"Then I shall not enlighten your ignorance. What a pity your memory should serve you such an ill-turn. Now, if you please, will you make your purchase? This is a busy day, and I must not spend too much time upon any one customer."

"If I can't have the flowers, I won't have anything," he answered, sullenly; then with an eagerness that had something of fierceness in it, "Do you know what all Drayton is saying? No? That you are going to marry Basil Charteris—are you?"

"Perhaps I am," she answered. "But I claim a woman's privilege of changing my mind even at the eleventh hour."

She had her eyes cast down, and was toying with some dainty trifles; when she looked up he was gone, and another patron claimed her attention.

CHAPTER IV.

SYBIL rose the next morning with a dull, heavy headache. She was languid and white; her perfect beauty was under a cloud, and yet Rupert thought he had never seen her so womanly and gentle, and the kindness of his manner roused fresh hopes in her heart; only they were doomed to be quickly destroyed.

"Miss Sybil," he said, after commiserating with her upon her indisposition, "you will think me very erratic, but I have altered my plans. In all probability I shall leave Drayton to-morrow—at the best I am but a bird of passage."

The pallor of her face was intensified, the slender hands were nervously clasping and unclasping; and although Rupert Ryland was as free from vanity as any living man, he could not be blind to these signs of Sybil's affection. Why, oh! why could he not love this fair and gentle woman? What a bitter destiny was his—a coquette held his heart in thrall, and he could not break his bonds so long as life endured.

"Going away?" said Sybil, faintly. "I am afraid you have found Drayton very dull?"

"Not at all; but I have suddenly remembered a promise given long ago to visit an old friend at his parsonage. I shall probably stay a fortnight; then go on to Brighton, where we shall meet again."

She was silent, thinking that she had yet another chance granted of winning him. After all, it would doubtless be best to go, and go quickly. Some explanation between Amoret and he might take place if he remained; and away from her rival's fascinations he would be more alive to her own; so, when he said,—

"You are not angry with me for my sudden determination?"

"N, oh, no," she answered, very gently, "there is no cause for anger."

But after he had left her she wept like a wild thing for a little while, feeling instinctively he had gone to seek her rival, and her soul was shaken with fear.

Rupert made his way at once to the school, it being now closing time, and as he drew near he saw Amoret's lithe, well-known figure issuing from the gates, and hastened to meet her.

A crimson flush rose to her face, and dying slowly out left her unnaturally pale; but her eyes were very bright and defiant as she lifted them to meet his, and with a slight bow she would have passed on, only Rupert turned with her, saying,—

"You will at least allow me the privilege of walking beside you for the last time, Miss Wyvern?"

"The last time!" she echoed, in low and level tones, wholly unshaken by emotion. "Then you propose leaving Drayton shortly?"

"I go to-morrow," watching her face for some sign of regret, and finding none, "and I feel I would like to say good-bye to you today. We may not meet again."

A cruel pain tore at her heart. In her anguish, in her shame at loving one she thought so unworthy even her esteem, she could have cried aloud; but she was strong in her woman's pride. It might be her heart would break, but this man should never guess the truth. She even smiled as she said,—

"I do not suppose our paths will ever cross. You forget our relative positions. I hope you will have a pleasant journey."

He flashed on her then, anger in eye and voice.

"Won't you say you are a little sorry? We used to seem such friends, you and I. If I could think that sometimes a faint regret would stir your heart when you remembered me, it would be a consolation. Do you know how very badly you have treated and are treating me?"

"No; you have no claim upon my affection or regard," coldly. "Why should we make

believe that you have?" and those wonderful eyes met his again with scorn in their depths. He was angry and hurt beyond measure; but she should not have the satisfaction of knowing this, so he answered as lightly as his heavy heart allowed.

"You have snubbed me very properly. Miss Wyvern. I presumed too far; and as Basil's fiancée you would naturally refuse friendship from any other man!"

"I am not his fiancée," swiftly, "perhaps I never shall be. I almost incline to the belief that marriage is a failure!"

He shrugged his shoulders disgustedly.

"If that is the case I would advise you to join the shrieking sisterhood at once. If you wait until both youth and beauty are gone, the world will comment unpleasantly upon your reasons for espousing such a cause!"

He spoke with brutal bluntness, for a man is never merciful in his anger, and the colour came and went fitfully in Amoret's fair face; but she heard him out in silence. Then she said, with a slight laugh.

"We never shall agree upon that subject, and I utterly refuse to quarrel with you when we are saying good-bye; and it must be good-bye now. Mr. Sidney is too unwell to receive visitors to-day," and having reached the Vicarage, she extended her hand to him.

He took and held it a moment, whilst he looked entreatingly into her eyes; but she had lost all faith in him, and would not allow his looks and words to move her.

"You have nothing to tell me?" he questioned, "nothing to say, Amoret, but a mere good-bye?"

"Where is the need for further speech? Good-bye!"

He dropped her hand hurriedly, and without another word left her; and this was the manner of their parting. With no outward sign of emotion, Amoret entered the room where Mrs. Sidney sat. Whatever she suffered she was strong to hide, and the lady guessed nothing of her trouble.

In heavy grief and forced merriment the day passed with Amoret, until Sybil came to pay her farewell visit. She was very kind and sympathetic, and the girl clung about her with fond observances.

"You must come back to us rosy and strong, Sybil. Of late you have looked so frail that I am anxious—oh! so very anxious concerning you!"

Miss Charteris smiled faintly.

"I am not ill, dear, only a little worried about Basil; he seems to care for nothing since your rejection of him. Naturally his trouble is mine, because we have only each other and he loves you so dearly, Amoret."

"Don't I distress me beyond measure. You almost make me feel that I have deliberately compassed his present unhappiness; and, oh! that is not true! You know it is not true! For his own sake I like him; for yours, dear Sybil, I would be his loyal friend. If my manner has misled him—"

"Poor little girl, it has; and so many folks have considered the marriage as a certainty that he has actually received congratulations upon it. You are hardly aware how kindly your manner is towards those who please you!"

"Are you going over to the majority?" questioned Amoret, swiftly; "will you, too, accuse me of coquetry?"

"No; because I know you better; but there are some who do not judge so leniently. And then, dear, Basil, though he is kind and generous, is not very astute; he always believed you cared for him, because you were always so good to him. Cannot you forget Rupert Ryland? Will you cast aside a heart of gold for a little heap of glittering dross? Dear Amoret, be good to Basil and yourself."

"You must not urge me so insistently," the girl cried, in greatest distress. "I will try to think of Basil as you wish, but I promise nothing. You must wait! You must wait—I want to be able to regain some of my lost faith."

A little later they parted, but Sybil was not unhopeful that the victory would be hers. Amoret was proud, perhaps on occasion the might proveumerous. Basil was a good specimen of English manhood, and he loved her with all his heart—surely success must smile upon his suit. Personally the had no objection to the governess, rather she preferred her to any other girl she knew; and if only their interests had not clashed, she would have been loyalty itself to her rival.

"I will be very good to her," she thought, as she went homewards, "and Basil's devotion will quickly win her to him; it is not in Amoret to be harsh or unresponsive. She will never learn the truth, and we shall be the best of friends. It must be my endeavour to win matrons over to my side." And with quite a comfortable feeling at her own benevolence, she put Amoret altogether out of her thoughts, and, having made all her preparations, went down to encourage and hearten Basil.

"I would not see her before going," she said, diplomatically; "when she has lost you she will appreciate you at your true value," and Basil allowed himself to be tuled by her superior wisdom.

At Brighton they were joined by Rupert, who was looking a trifle haggard and worn, but seemed in very fair spirits. He had been fighting hard with his love for Amoret, and was foolish enough to think that in time he would conquer it; and he found Sybil so beautiful and gracious that he resolved before their holiday came to a close to ask her to be his wife.

With all her heart she worshipped him, and, unlike Amoret, she had neither the strength nor the wish to hide this from him; she was so happy in his presence that her loveliness took a tenderer cast, and only when alone was she fearful of the end. She knew that Rupert would never forgive deceit; th! then, her object must be to keep him apart from Amoret. Even if they met, surely she could contrive to prevent any explanation taking place: it was so easy to work upon the girl's sensitiveness and pride.

So it came about that on the last day of their stay at Brighton Rupert found her alone, Mrs. Charteris having discreetly given him this opportunity for speech.

The girl welcomed him with eloquent eyes, which lent meaning to the few conventional words; and as he retained possession of her slender hand she began to tremble, knowing that the hour for which she had prayed, for which she had striven, had at last arrived.

"I cannot tell you leave me," said Rupert, "without telling you all that I have wished to say since I came here. To-morrow, I understand, you are off to the Highlands, where (if this interview closes as I hope it may) I will presently follow. Dear Sybil, above all women I know, I esteem you, and have a very real and deep affection for you—I want you for my wife."

It was not an impassioned wooing, but Sybil was prepared to take Rupert on his own terms: he was so dear to her, and surely his love would eventually be hers. She could not speak, for the sudden wild gladness possessing her; and he went on with grave gentleness.

"I feel sure that if you will trust yourself to me, I can make you happy. I do not profess, dear, to love you with all the wild rapture of youth; but the feeling I entertain for you is more enduring. Sybil, shall this little hand be mine?"

She lifted her lovely eyes a moment to his. "You have made me the happiest of women," she said under her breath. "I love you, dear Rupert, and my love will compel yours."

He kissed her very gently. "He felt a great pity for her. It was hard she should not have the first place in his heart, she who would soon bear his name; but in time—oh, yes, in time—he would love her even as she deserved and desired."

"You shall never regret giving me this great boon," he said; "and, Sybil, there shall be no secret between us. I will tell you all the truth about myself. Let us start honestly, so that we make no shipwreck of our lives. My dear, it may hurt you at first to know there was a woman who seemed the one woman in the world for me. Against my better judgment I gave her all my heart; I fell down in spirit and worshipped her. But she was utterly heartless, she never had cared for me; at the last she did not seek to hide this. You will suffer doubt and fear no longer when I tell you that now, for all the wealth of the Indies, I would not call her wife."

Sybil's face was very white.

"I am glad you have confided in me," she said, in a shaken voice, "and, despite your earlier love, I am not afraid to trust you. The day will come when I shall possess all that she has lost," and then, as she clung about him, he vowed to himself that he would blot out all memory of the wretched past.

Surely it would not be hard to love so beautiful and good a woman; and yet, as he walked back, to his lodgings, Amoret's grace and bewitching ways, her smiles and glances returned to him, until he almost cursed her memory; and, upstairs in her own room, Sybil was praying that he might never learn by what fraudulent means she had won him.

They went to Scotland, and Rupert joined them there. In her great happiness, his fiancee forgot all her fears and doubts. He was so kind, so tender, that she began to believe he was really forgetting her rival, and lost herself in a dream of bliss.

She dared not write to Amoret concerning her engagement, for had she not declared herself disappointed in Rupert, and unable longer to esteem him? But the news quickly reached Drayton through the medium of society papers.

"My dear," said Mrs. Sidney to Amoret, on her return from morning school, "I have something to tell you. I dare say Sybil will send full particulars soon; just now it is quite probable she has forgotten our existence. Love is proverbially selfish."

"Man's love," interpolated the girl with a slight laugh, "that goes without saying; women generally err on the other side. I suppose you are going to tell me Sybil is engaged?"

"What a witch you are, and what an excessively poor opinion you have of men. Ah, my child, you will speak differently some day. Yes, Sybil is going to be married, but the ceremony is not yet fixed. Can you guess the happy man's name? He's an acquaintance of yours. There, I'll not keep you in suspense longer. Mr. Ryland has proposed and been accepted."

Poor wretched Amoret! She had just sufficient strength and thought left to avert her face from the other's gaze. She knew it was awful to look upon, that it was distorted beyond recognition; and she listened to Mrs. Sidney's voice, which sounded so far away, as she continued,—

"It is a very suitable alliance, of course, but I never thought Mr. Ryland very attentive to Sybil—he seemed rather to devote himself especially to you; I suppose I was mistaken. I hope they will be very happy—as happy as Julian and I have always been; and, of course, you will send your congratulations?"

Amoret did not look at her as she said,—

"I, too, wish them all happiness; but I shall not write until I hear from Sybil. I shall not presume so far; I must remember my subordinate position always, and act with due humility."

"Amoret!" But the girl had left the room, and saying, sadly to herself, "Her misfortune is waging her bitter nature, poor child!" Mrs. Sidney turned once more to her paper.

Upstairs Amoret stood looking from her window. For the first time in her life she doubted her friend, and wondered in her heart if indeed Rupert had been as false as she represented.

It could not be true! oh, it could not! And

now, perhaps, by her own folly and coldness she had alienated his love from herself, and ruined all her life.

Then a bitter self-scorn possessed her. She had been sport for his idle hours. Perhaps he had even liked her a little; but he had said, "when I take a wife she shall be my equal socially;" the girl laughed bitterly then, and yet there was something of triumph in the sound, and so he had chosen Sybil.

And then all her heart melted towards Rupert's fiancee.

"Dear Sybil," she whispered, "who can wonder that she is willing to give him all her life, he deceived her even as he deceived me; but I pray she may never realise his utter baseness, for that would kill her."

CHAPTER V.

Not until the year was very old did the Charteris's return to Drayton to find Amoret apparently her own bright self—just as bewitching as formerly, only there was an added dash of piquancy, not to say bitterness, in some of her laughing speeches.

In her heart Sybil was terribly afraid of the meeting which must ensue of the reproaches which might follow; but, gathering her courage together, she resolved to make the first advances, and so went to Amoret.

The girl had neither an unkind word nor look for her. She was inexpressibly glad to welcome her home, and was full of a deep pity for Sybil, because, although she loved Rupert herself, she believed him wholly worthless. Had he not striven to win her heart whilst he intended all along to marry her friend? And was not that grossest disloyalty?

But she said nothing of this to Sybil, with outstretched hands she rose to meet her.

"So you have returned, and I am more glad than you can tell. I have been lost without you! And, how well you are looking—happiness is a wonderful beautifier!"

"Yes, I am happy," murmured Sybil, so relieved by the other's manner that she was ready to swear eternal friendship; "although when I left home I hardly thought I could be glad again. Darling Amoret, you remember a conversation we had. I was all but broken-hearted that I must repeat such things to you, and I loved him even then, and I felt I could never trust him again. But he has been sorry ever since that he judged you so foolishly, that he behaved so cruelly, and when he told me I was all the world to him—forgive me—I could not send him away."

Whilst she was speaking Amoret had winced visibly; but when she ended she sat erect, a bright red spot burning on either cheek.

"Dear Sybil, I rejoice in your happiness, and I can fully and freely forgive Mr. Ryland. All men have occasional lapses of honour, and he is less guilty than most. It will not hurt me to meet him as your affianced husband; after all I but fancied I cared a wee bit for him. It was my vanity and not my heart he wounded, and I am too much accustomed to unkindly trifles to fret about it. I dare say some of my hundred and one friends taught Mr. Ryland to regard me as an adventuress and coquette;" Sybil flushed crimson. "It shall be your task to make a proselyte of him; and Sybil, dear, here she grew very pale, "you will never, never tell him—even when he is your husband, that once I fancied I—I loved him." The last three words in a hushed voice.

"Never," answered Sybil, emphatically. "I could not be guilty of such cruelty, and most girls have had one or two 'fancies' before they settle down to married life. Mamma always carefully guarded me from any entanglement, but you, my dear child, have missed a mother's care—and have seen so little of the world that you are prone to accept everything au vertreux. Poor Amoret!"

"Don't pity me. I have learned wisdom at last," laughed the girl, blithely. "It was necessary I should. I was growing so vain

March 5, 1892.

THE LONDON READER.

463

that I might have worn the peacock's plumage; and I was quite in danger of forgetting my proper position. Now, let us go to Mrs. Sidney. She is the dearest old lady in the world, and is as glad as even I can be to think of your happiness."

And Sybil felt, with something like shame, how little she deserved all this love and kindness. In her heart of hearts she would have given much only to be as innocent and guileless as "the prettiest girl in Drayton."

Her wedding had been fixed for the fifteenth of February, and preparations for this important function went on merrily. Amoret being often consulted, and she never failed to help so far as she could, until even Mrs. Charteris unbent and welcomed her as her daughter's friend. She was very wretched in those days, but she gave no sign of it, save an occasional fit of recklessness when she showered her favours broadcast among her admirers.

Christmas came and went; the new year brought fresh hopes, fresh thoughts to a weary world, and Rupert Ryland, much against his will, returned to Drayton. He feared to meet Amoret, but not for worlds would he seem to slight the beautiful woman so soon to be his wife.

Miss Wyvern heard of his arrival. If she grew a trifle paler, if her sweet mouth wore a sterner look, none saw it, none guessed that she was suffering anguish unspeakable.

Two days went by, and she had not seen him. He had called at the Vicarage, deliberately choosing an hour when she was engaged at school. But of his visit, how he looked, what he said, she heard little, because almost as soon as she had entered a letter came for her. She knew the handwriting, and grew tremulous. She read the few short lines with moist eyes and quickened breath.

"*MY DEAR CHILD,*"

"Come home. I am alone and in misery. Baby Dennis is dead, and she has left me. I was a blind old fool, but you will forgive me and return to me. I will meet you at Charing-cross to morrow. You can leave Drayton by the three train—and together we will travel home. Your loving father,"

"DUGALD BEAMISH."

Amoret passed the letter to Mrs. Sidney. "I must go," she cried, after a brief pause. "He is my father, and he never would have closed his heart against me but for that dreadful woman. He wants me—he has no one now. Poor little Dennis is dead." Then her arms fell slackly to her sides. "I beg your pardon. I forgot I am but a hired servant."

"You have no right to speak so," Mrs. Sidney rejoined, with as much severity as she was capable of showing towards her young friend. "We have considered you in the light of a dear daughter, not as a servant. Of course you must go. Miss Compton is quite capable of managing the school now, and your place is by your father, and you owe a duty to society. How glad I am now, Amoret, that you have kept so clear of all engagements, for goodness only knows how your father would have received such news. You will not, of course return to school, except to say goodbye to the children, and I will assist you with your preparations; but oh, dear! oh, dear! what shall we do without you?" and the kind-hearted little lady began to cry. "You will be quite lost to us!"

"No, no," said Amoret, kissing her fondly, "I shall come to see you often, and you must pay me nice long visits; but I shall feel keenly leaving Drayton. One favour I want you to add to the thousands you have already lavished upon me. Do not reveal my identity to any person until I am well away. It might be awkward for some of those who have patronised me so superciliously to discover my real name and position," and somewhat reluctantly Mrs. Sidney promised.

A letter was sent to Miss Compton, inform-

ing her that Miss Wyvern would not again return to her duties, as she was leaving Drayton at once, and that Mr. Sidney would see to her own installation as principal of the High School; and the news spread like wild-fire that "the prettiest girl in Drayton" was suddenly leaving the town for some mysterious reason.

"The Sidneys are tired of their protégée at last," said Mrs. Charteris, triumphantly, "and I cannot say I am sorry. No good is ever done by lifting people out of their proper sphere. I wonder what her offence is."

"How quick you are to imagine evil of Miss Wyvern," remarked Basil, moodily.

He had only that day returned to his home, and the news of Amoret's departure was a frightful blow to him.

Why was she leaving them all so suddenly? And when she had once gone would he ever see her dear face, or clasp her hand again? If only he could meet her now, perhaps he might prevail upon her to listen to his suit. He could but try; and she was too merciful longer to refuse to ease his burden.

And whilst he thought thus Amoret was announced, Mrs. Charteris receiving her with the old time frigidity, but Sybil's manner was prettily affectionate.

"I suppose," said Amoret, as she seated herself, "the news has already reached you. Oh, yes, it is quite true I leave here to-morrow, and shall return no more save as a visitor. I have come to say good-bye. It is all very sudden, and I feel leaving Drayton dreadfully. I have been very happy here, but my friends need me."

"I understood always that you were without friends," snapped Mrs. Charteris.

The girl met her basilisk glance without flinching, and her tone had a distinct touch of hauteur in it as she replied,—

"I did not deny having relatives, madam!" and Sybil hastened to keep the peace, by asking what was her destination.

First Charing Cross, then Lexington. I will write you from there; and with all my heart, dear Sybil, I wish your new life may be crowned with joy.

She did not stay long, having so many farewell visits to make, and Sybil sighed relievedly when she rose to go. Now, indeed, she was free from fear. If ever Amoret returned it would not be to find her there, and Rupert would never know the lie by which she won him.

Basil brooked with Amoret.

"You will let me walk with you a little way?" he asked, not heeding his mother's warning look, "it may be for the very last time."

"I am going to the school. You may walk so far with me if you choose," and they went into the dulness of the winter afternoon.

Basil chose the furthest route because it lay along a lane little frequented, save in the summer. Come what might, he intended putting his fate to a final test to-day, he would not lose this girl for lack of importunity and courage.

"Amoret," he said, hurriedly, "you remember what I said to you in the summer, and how you answered me? To-day I ask you again to be my wife. Hush, I will speak now whilst the chance is still mine. I know nothing of your past, of your parentage, of the reason for this sudden departure. I don't ask to know. I don't care to know—as I love you, so I trust and reverence you, and I beg you to reconsider your decision, and to make me the happiest of men. Will you do this, dear heart, for the sake of my great love?"

He was so much in earnest, so willing to give her all that he could—his name and his position with all his honest heart—that the girl was unaffectedly touched, and the eyes which met his so frankly and kindly were full of pitying tears.

"I wish I could answer you as you desire," she said, tremulously. "I am sure that any woman would find you the kindest and best of husbands! Your loyalty and goodness to me

have been beyond measure—and I can only give you pain. Oh, I am so sorry! so sorry! Try, try to forgive me and forget!"

He took her hands in his; she was too grieved to repulse him, or free herself from his gentle hold.

"Think again, dear. There is no other fellow will ever care for you more devoutly than I; and I will not press you to marry me now. I will be content to wait your pleasure so long as I have your promise. You are too young and pretty to fight your way in the world, contesting every step—it is a shame that you should waste your youth and winsomeness upon a crowd of unruly children—sweetheart, say yes!"

"I cannot," she answered, remorsefully, "we can never be anything but friends, for without love I will not marry. Then you must not remember me any more as lonely and friendless; I am going to my father who needs me sorely."

"Your father!" she echoed, amazedly, drawn a moment from the contemplation of his woes by this startling announcement. "I thought you were an orphan!"

"I never said so; all Drayton will soon know the truth. I did not intend to speak before going away; but I owe it to you I think to tell you all. No other man has ever paid me the high honour that you have done. I was pretty and bright enough to amuse their idle hours; but I was an inferior," she smiled a little scornfully then, and went on.

"Three years ago my father married for the second time, choosing for his wife a lady who had been my governess for a short while. She was a handsome, unscrupulous woman, and from the first I saw she intended to win him; I hated and distrusted her, and warned my father against her, in a youthful, hot-headed way which incensed him against me, and made Madame Tiers my enemy.

"They were married secretly; and then my father told me plainly that in all things I must submit myself to my step-mother and treat her with all due respect. I confess that I never tried to conciliate her, and, almost daily there were distressing scenes between us, and my father became more and more alienated from me, more and more harsh to me, until my life was a burden. And in this fashion a year passed, then a son was born. Heaven knows, I who was so lonely and loveless, was prepared to lavish nothing but fondness upon him, but I was scarcely allowed to approach him, my stepmother alleging that my motives were sinister, my affection assumed.

"Things came at last to a climax, she declaring that if I remained in the house, she would take her baby and go. The upshot was, I was despatched at once to Mr. Sidney, an old friend of my father's; but I utterly refused to accept an allowance, and as Mr. Sidney thought highly of my intellectual acquirements, and was needing a mistress for his new school, he kindly appointed me.

"From the time I came to Drayton I have heard nothing until to-day of my own people, save what I learned through the medium of the newspapers; but this morning my father wrote, stating that his son was dead, and his wife had deserted him, praying me to go without delay to him. In future you must think of me, not as Amoret Wyvern, but Amoret Wyvern Beamish, only child of Lord Beamish."

Basil was startled and staggered a moment; then, despite his misery, he laughed.

It was all too comical to think of the dismay of the worthy Drayton matrons when they learned the girl's true position. They had all combined to warn their sons against an alliance with one so undesirable. They had used every petty art to spoil her popularity, his own mother leading the way, and lo! she took precedence of them all, it would be gall and wormwood to them. But his merriment soon died out.

"I am not so blind," he said, moodily, "as not to see. I am no longer in any way an

eligible parti for you ; but I loved you before I knew the truth. Do not leave me utterly hopeless ! "

" I can do no other," gently. " Perhaps I have no heart. I do not think I shall ever marry."

" Amoret," the young man said, hoarsely. " Was there no one you ever cared for so ? I used to think once I had a rival in Rupert. Ah ! " as the hot blood flamed into her cheeks, " I have guessed the truth. You need not fear I ever will repeat it ; but I cannot understand why, if he cared for you, and I know he did, you should send him away ; but I understand your changed manner towards him and his bitter thoughts of you. Amoret, why did you say no to him ? "

" He never asked me to marry him." she answered, in a low, shamed voice. " He was but abusing himself, and I came to know this. His own scandalous words were retold to me. Listen to them," and in her manner there was fierce defiance. " Miss Wyvern is awfully good fun ; just the sort of girl to amuse an idle fellow ; but not the sort he would wish to marry, and when I take a wife she shall be my equal socially."

" Rupert never uttered such detestable words. He could not be such an unmitigated cad. I am sure of it," Basil cried, generously.

" But I know that he could, and was ! "

" Who told you this ? "

" Sybil. They were spoken to her ; and she would not lie to me."

CHAPTER VI.

He dropped her hands and stared at her with blank eyes. He was sure some great wrong had been done, and by his sister. It rested with him to right it ; but to do this he must put Sybil to open shame and wreak her happiness. Could he ? Would not Amoret forget in time, and turn to him ? Then he shrank from the thoughts of sharing Sybil's dishonour. He would not win his wife by being party to a fraud. But his voice was very queer and unsteady as he said,—

" I am sure there has been some mistake, although I can't tell where. You have given me first surprise and now a shock. It seems incredible that Rupert ——"

" Do not speak of him again," the girl cried, quickly. " I want to forget, and I want you honestly to try to blot me out of your mind and affection ; because, let come what may, I cannot marry you. Say good-bye, now, and let me go, this has been a trying day."

" Good-bye," he said, absently, " good-bye, Heaven bless you ; " and then she entered the school-gates, whilst he went slowly and miserably home.

What did it all mean ? What arts had Sybil used to part these two, so well calculated to make each other happy, and in her heart Amoret was saying again and again,—

" Could there have been a mistake ? Could Sybil have lied to me to gain her own ends ? Oh, I dare not think that ! She is not so base, and yet, if it is true, I have lost my pride step between my love and me. No, no, it must be false," and she hardly heard the words of farewell spoken, for the beating of her heart, and the throbbing of her brain.

Reaching home, Basil went at once into the women folks' presence. Each looked up with concern at his white, stern face, Sybil feeling a thrill of fear. Mrs. Charteris said, quickly,—

" Basil, what has happened ? You have surely not been mad enough to propose to that girl ? "

" I have proposed a second time, and a second time been rejected," he said, recklessly ; " and I may as well tell you I was presumptuous to aspire to her hand. She is Amoret Wyvern Beamish, only child of Lord Beamish. Sybil, when you can spare me a little time I have something to say to you."

Mrs. Charteris uttered a sharp cry at his

announcement ; but, startling as it was, it had little effect on Sybil, who was all but paralysed with fear, something in her brother's face warning her he was not wholly ignorant of her duplicity, and what might he not do in his anger ? In two days Rupert would arrive. Would Basil visit his anger upon her to the extent of warning her lover against her ? Not that, oh, not that ! and then her mother's voice smote duly on her darkened senses.

" Sybil, what blind folks we have been. There was always something extraordinary about the girl. We might have guessed she could not have attained that air of breeding. I think the Sydneys ought to be thoroughly ashamed to have deceived us so grossly—at least they might have confided her story to you—and now of course she will never forgive my coldness towards her. It would have been such a lovely place to visit too (regretfully). Basil," but Basil was gone and Sybil sat with her face hidden by her hand, head and heart alike in pain.

What should she do ? What could she do ? Come what might Rupert must be left in ignorance of the truth ; she would not lose him now at the eleventh hour.

Then Rupert arrived, and, to Sybil's great relief, Basil was absent at the time. The young man took his *sister's* beautiful face between his hands, looking with grave gentleness into her eyes.

" What is ailing you, dear ? Are your people blind that they do not see how pale and weary you have grown ? "

She clung to him in a very abandonment of love.

" I shall be myself now you have come. Oh, Rupert, you never can tell how bitterly I have missed you."

There were tears in her eyes, tears in her voice. He could not fail to be moved by her evident love, and vowed in his heart he would crush out all thought of Amoret and cling only to this woman whose hero he was, whose husband he soon would be !

She was very happy that evening, although her mother would dilate upon the wonderful news concerning Amoret ; telling Rupert that Lady Beamish was a dreadful woman and had eloped with a former lover, but that her lord did not intend to apply for a divorce being unable to bear such publicity as must follow.

Basil was still absent, and Sybil went that night to rest, with the blessed belief that he would spare her. They had always been such friends, and surely he would consider the family honour.

But she was doomed to be undecived. She had risen early and gone down to the library all unconscious that Basil had returned at midnight, that he heard the opening and shutting of her door next morning, and, bent upon obtaining an interview, had dressed very hurriedly and negligently.

She started with a cry when he entered, and sought to leave him, but this he would not allow. He came forward and barred her passage.

" Sybil, I must speak to you or I will go at once to Ryland, and tell him all the truth."

She drew herself erect, her white, passion-stirred face turned fully upon him each was wholly oblivious that the door was ajar and any passer by might hear their words, her eyes flashed angrily upon him.

" You are both enigmatical and insolent. Please to tell me what you mean, and be as brief as you can."

" You know what I have to say. You have carefully avoided me these two days that you should not hear the truth in all its shameful nakedness. When you promised to help me win Miss Beamish it was stipulated on my part that no unfair or dishonourable means should be used to compass our object. You were indignant that I should use such words to you, and yet, all the while, you were plotting against her."

" I will not listen longer to you."

" You must and shall ! Under the guise of friendship you approached Amoret ; you taught her to believe that Rupert was an utter cad and scoundrel ! "

" No, no ! " cried Sybil, wildly. " Is my word as nothing when weighed against hers ? "

" I would believe her before all the world, she is truth itself ; and you only add to your sin by these vain denials. You told her she had made sport for Rupert's idle hours—she believed and believes you still. You knew their love was mutual, and yet you stepped between ; and I say this evil you have begun shall be ended, that Rupert shall never marry you in ignorance of the truth, although I myself have to tell him the disgraceful fraud you have perpetrated."

She ran to him, clinging about him with wild tears and sobs.

" For Heaven's sake, no ! It will kill me to lose him. I love him, oh, with all my soul. I love him ; and Amoret will forget. She is too proud to give affection to another woman's husband, and I shall not fail to win Rupert's heart. Keep my secret."

" He cannot ; it is already known ! " said a stern voice from the doorway.

Sybil shrewdly cast her arms with a wild cry of " Rupert ! " and but that Basil caught and held her fast, she must have fallen.

The young man placed her upon a couch, then turning to Rupert, said,—

" I do not know how much or how little you have heard, but it is only just that you should hear her in her self-defence."

" Leave us ; this is a matter entirely between ourselves." Rupert answered, heavily.

" Be gentle with her," urged the brother, pitiably ; " she is a woman, and through her extreme love has sinned," and then he went out, leaving these two, who so shortly were to be made man and wife, together.

Sybil lay with hidden face, not daring so much as to glance at the man she had wronged ; and his slow, bitter accents smote like hammers upon her anguished heart.

" Tell me all that you have said and done ; concealment is beyond the question now."

" Must I ? must I ? Have mercy on me, Rupert ! I have not sinned so very grievously, and she was ready to believe harm of you. It is I—I only who love you with all my soul and strength."

" You have shown your love in a peculiar fashion," he retorted. " Now tell me, word for word, what you said so completely to destroy her faith in me. It is my right to know. I will know ! My honour is dear to me, although apparently you hold it so cheap," and his will dominated hers, and compelled her obedience.

Slowly, and like a child repeating a lesson, she repeated those false and cruel words which had darkened Amoret's life and changed the world for him.

He listened frowningly, a sick self scorn possessing him that he had been so ready to believe evil of the girl he loved, so ready to trust this fair woman he had promised to make his wife ; and when she had ended, he said, harshly,—

" You have spoiled two lives, and I shall never forgive you."

She cried out wildly then, and rising, would have touched him, but he shrank back from her, with loathing and anger in his gloomy eyes.

" Rupert, you do not think what you are saying ; you do not mean these bitter words. Remember all you are to me, all I was and am to be to you."

" I wish I could forget," he said, bitterly, " but, unfortunately, you have left me some remnant of honour. I am not yet dead to the instincts of a gentleman, although you have done your best to make me appear so. I am bound to you by my word, and I shall not seek to break it. You are a woman, you were to have been my wife. I cannot put you to open shame, I will give you my name, but with it nothing else. Any affection I may have had for you is estranged, any esteem—

and I did esteem you—is dead; and through all our lives we shall be as strangers to each other."

"You mean this?" she gasped, her white face grown fierce. She loved him, but she was a proud woman, and much spoiled by flattery. This plain speaking was more than she could endure, and for the while love was swallowed up in wrath. In a passion of rage she confronted him. "You mean that just to save me from ill-natured gossip, you will go through a mere farce of marriage, after which I may go my way and you yours, so long as I am content to appear to the world as a happy wife? Let us have no misunderstandings now."

"You have guessed precisely the line of life I would adopt. No other is open to us. I never shall trust you again; I never shall cease to reproach myself for my folly in the past. You have taken from me all power of explanation. How can I defend myself when to do so would be to degrade you before her and all the world. This wretched secret must remain our own; but in just this one thing she has her revenge—all my life I shall love and worship her, as now I long for her!"

Sybil caught her breath sharply, her colour came and went fitfully, and her eyes were wild as those of some poor creature driven to bay.

"You think," she said at last, "you think I will consent to marry you on such conditions? I will not! Oh! I will not! I am not so mean a woman that I should bear to see another preferred to me always; to sit, as it were, by suffrage at my husband's table, reading base and scorn in his every glance; and so, Mr. Ryland, I give you your freedom!"

A gleam of hope flashed over his face, but it died quickly out.

"I am bound to you."

"I loose your bonds, since they have proved so irksome," she answered, swiftly.

"You are incapable of quiet thought now. If you set me free you must face the consequences of your act. The charitable world will have much to say on the subject."

"I care nothing now for the world and its opinion, having lost you! Go back to Amoret and be happy. You hesitated to marry the poor governess, perhaps the daughter of an ancient race may disdain to hear you now! Take back your ring," she flung it scornfully upon the floor before him, "and wish it take back every vow you made, and have so flagrantly broken," and then with a heart heavy with anguish, and eyes dim with pain and rage she fled from the room and Rupert.

CHAPTER VII.

BEFORE evening came Sybil had bitterly repented her outburst of anger; but she could not yet believe, although she had given Rupert his freedom, that he would accept it, although he had once removed all his belongings to the nearest hotel.

She was too beautiful lightly to be forgotten, if she had sinned it was for love of him, and then, too, he hated nothing so much as scandal.

But her heart failed when night arrived, bringing no message from him, and her mother's angry reproofs, her father's manifest vexation did not tend to lessen her hurt.

With a pride which nothing could subdue she went down to breakfast at the usual hour. Basil looked up pityingly as she entered from the letter he was reading; but she met his compassionate gaze with eyes full of angry scorn.

He sighed a little, and then with gently spoken words passed the letter to her. It was in Rupert's handwriting, and the words swam before her.

"I sincerely hope," said Mrs. Charteris, angrily, "that Rupert has forgiven you, and

is willing for the ceremony to take place. If not you have spoiled your chances altogether, and made us all ridiculous."

"Be merciful to her, mother," pleaded Basil, she has enough to bear, and as the unhappy girl rose hurriedly, he put an arm about her, and drawing her gently from the room said, "Dear Sybil, it will all come right in time; and you will forgive me that I brought about this sorrow. In honour, poor little sister, I was bound to speak!"

"Honour!" she cried, shrilly, "what is that compared with love? such love as I had for him!" and bursting him roughly aside she flew upstairs, and locking herself in her room, read the words Rupert had written.

He told his story in a manly way without reservation or addition; and whilst frankly confessing his love for Amoret, declared he had been still resolved to make Sybil his wife, but that she had refused to become; so he had accepted his freedom.

For the rest, whatever society at large might say or think upon the matter, let all the blame be his. He was a man, and could bear it; and he hoped at some not far distant date to learn Miss Charteris was well and happily settled.

Sybil crushed the letter in her hand, and with blank face and wild eyes went down stairs again. In a paroxysm of anguish she flung herself down on her knees at Basil's feet, crying—

"I did not mean it! I did not mean it! Oh! bring him back to me; I shall die without him!"

With infinite gentleness he raised her in his arms.

"My dear, it is too late. He is gone no one knows where. He never will return to you. It must be your labour to forget."

"He will go to Amoret," she moaned, "she will take my place. Write to her, Basil, tell her all the truth. She must hear it soon; let her learn it from you!"

The Charteris's left Drayton for an indefinite period, but Basil, before going, had written a long and explanatory letter to Amoret, begging her forgiveness on his sister's behalf, and the girl had wept tears that were not all unhappy over the manly epistle.

So she had not given her heart to one who was all unworthy. Rupert had loved her, they might have been so happy but for Sybil, and a hot anger stirred her a moment. But then the recollection of Basil's love, his generosity and self-abnegation, the thought of all the misery her whilom friend must now be enduring, vanquished her natural indignation.

"Poor Sybil! oh, poor Sybil!" she said, softly to herself, "she has lost all, and his scorn must be so hard to endure. She must have loved him beyond all words to have purged herself for his sake;" and, then, with a heart full of pity, she wrote Sybil, assuring her of her full and perfect pardon, begging her not to dwell upon the past, which it should be her (Amoret's) daily endeavour to forget, and ending with such kind wishes that Sybil broke utterly down as she read.

Then Amoret waited for Rupert's coming; for he would come to her she knew, not just yet, when Sybil's pain was so new, but soon, and they would be glad together.

Her life with her father was a very quiet an uneventful one. The disgrace which had befallen him weighed so heavily upon him to admit of his going much amongst his former friends. Of Lady Beamish nothing further was ever heard; but he lived in almost daily fear lest she should return to torture him again, and clung to Amoret with a love and childlike faith that was infinitely touching, infinitely pathetic; and never by word or look did she reproach him with his past unnatural conduct.

All that was best and noblest in her was called into active life, all that was womanly was developed; much of her sauciness

had fallen from her or lay dormant; but about her there was such sweetness, such thoughtfulness for others, that, looking on her Lord Beamish, recalled the days of his early married life, when her mother, another Amoret, had made the sunshine of his home.

At the close of June he died, and when all the last rites were ended, Mrs. Sidney carried Amoret back to Drayton, where she was received with a deference which appealed peculiarly to her sense of humour.

The Charteris's were still abroad, or the girl would not have made her home with the Vicarage people, fearing as she did to hurt Sybil.

Time wore by, softening her sorrow, and it was now at the close of August. She had spent two quiet restful months at Drayton, and was pondering now what she should do with her future.

She had half hoped that Rupert would have sought her sooner, but she did not doubt him, and as she leaned over the little low gate thinking of him, he came through the mist, as once before he had done, to join her.

She knew him, even before he spoke. All her heart cried out to her, "It is he! it is he!" but her lips were silent, and she could not move. But when he had reached her side—and indeed he was swift to do so—when he had taken her hands in his, and spoken her name in tenderest accents, she found courage to lift her eyes to him, and what she saw there must have strengthened her heart, so full of rapture was her sweet face.

"Amoret," he said, "I am not worthy to lift my eyes to you; I am not worthy to touch the hem of your garment, humbling himself to the very earth as lovers will, and yet I love you. I have loved you all along, and only you can make my life glad!"

She held back a moment.

"Are you quite, quite sure you will never doubt me again; that your faith is as fixed as your love. Tell me that, and tell it me truly?"

"I will say it again, my sweetheart, my wife. I have been a blind fool all along; but I have heard it said that a woman will forgive all things to the man she loves—all save unfaith to herself—is that true, Amoret?"

"As true as my love for you," she answered, under her breath. "Let us put the past away. You were not more feeble of faith than I—"

And what more she said the chronicler cannot narrate, because you see her face was hidden on Ruper's shoulder, so that her words were stifled; and when, with gentle force he raised it, it was only to hold her lips silent with his own.

And the moon looked down upon them, the trees swayed above them in the soft, sweet breeze, as they stood there together clothed in all the glory of a love "strong as death—true as steel!"

Sybil Charteris never returned to England. When time had healed her sorrows she married a rich Austrian, who simply idolised his beautiful, somewhat pensive wife, and in time, his love compelling hers, she forgot her old infatuation, and reigned as queen in her brilliant circle; but Basil is still faithful to Amoret's memory.

[THE END.]

SODA WATER is an American drink. It is as essentially American as port, Rhine wine and claret are distinctly English, German and French. The most interesting fact in the manufacture of soda water is that it contains no soda.

ANOTHER new cure for influenza is said to have been discovered by Maryport physician. It consists of the administration of large and repeated doses of bicarbonate of potassium. It has been tried with great success in Maryport and elsewhere, three doses spread over a period of nine hours being generally enough to destroy the disease.

AN EVIL DEED.

CHAPTER XIV.—(continued)

"AMBROSE!" called out Mr. Glaister, sharply, startling the man out of a thoughtful fit.

"Yessir," responded Ambrose, touching his battered hat.

"I wish you to understand that Miss Glaister is never to visit anywhere. I don't suppose I shall allow you to drive her again, but, if ever you do, remember my wishes."

"Yessir," came the meek answer.

Owing to her mother's sadly afflicted condition, went on the Rev. Nicholas pompously, "it is impossible that my daughter can become intimate with anyone; impossible, too, that she should ever marry. She must be content to live her life alone with me and Mrs. Bartram, for she is not like other girls."

"Dear, dear!" cried the old gardener, simply. "Poor young lady! Why, she might lose her reason too, sir, I suppose?"

The question was asked so innocently, that the other man was completely taken in by it. He sighed heavily, and covered his eyes for a instant with his bony hand.

"Yes, Ambrose," he said, gently, "'tis sad when such an affliction visits a family. Surely I have been sorely tried, and deserve a rich reward!"

"You do, indeed, sir!" ejaculated Ambrose, with fervour.

"Thank you, my man! Take the pony round. Good night!"

And, still overcome, the sorely-tried man walked slowly into the house.

"Oh, you clever rascal!" muttered Ambrose, as he drove towards the stable. "I'll be even with you. I'd wager my next year's salary that there's something very queer going on now between those two devils. Would any decent father let out such fearful news as what he's just told me—to a servant—no, not of a gardener? Pehaw! It's positive asridge to think of that devil as father to such a sweet, pure angel as Miss Barbara! What, if in tracking them down for one crime, I come upon another? These wretches are capable of anything—ay, even kidnapping! Hal hal!" he laughed as he unlocked the stable door. "the stupid old gardener will come out finely yet!"

Late that evening poor little Barbara sat by her open window—her hands clasped listlessly together—gazing out at the sweet summer night, with burning, aching eyes.

Mrs. Bartram had stayed some time with her, speaking in the most insulting, sneering terms of her visit to young Bonaventure.

"I—I did not know it was wrong!" the girl cried at last, in desperation, "and I'm sure he did not think me fat and unattractive. No," with increasing energy as she remembered Guy's kind, chivalrous manner, "I know he did not!"

"Bah!" snarled Mrs. Bartram, turning to leave the room. "I know what young men are, and I know that he'll think very lightly of you for paying him a visit all alone. Why, every man in his club will know it in a few days!"

"Oh, leave me!" cried the poor demented child, stamping her foot in her anger and distress.

"Oh, I'm going!" was the sneering retort; and, in another minute, the key turned in the lock. The child was left alone to brood over the lying poisonous words that her tormentor had spoken.

"Oh, will my cheeks ever be cool again?" the girl cried aloud, leaning out of the window, a passionate despair in every line of her face. "Will he think me bold and forward? I wish I knew. Well," with a great sigh, "I shall never see him again!"

There was a very sad expression in the beautiful eyes as she uttered these words; and, involuntarily, her hands stole up to the

rose he had given her, still nestling in the lace of her dress. "How good and kind he was! I should like to see him again," she murmured, pensively. "But, ah, no! I forgot; not if he thinks me unattractive. No, no!"

She sank down wearily, and hid her burning face in her trembling hands. Suddenly the knowledge seemed to come to her that she was no longer a child but a woman with all a woman's great capacity for loving and caring for the one who was kind to her, and that knowledge seemed to fill her fresh young heart with a strange mixture of fear and joy.

All at once she lifted her head and glanced round her in a tightened way, some one had spoken in low, cautious tones:

"Miss Barbara," said the voice; and looking down she saw the queer old gardener. "Don't fret, miss," he said, noticing the poor little pallid face and glittering eyes. "Never mind that old cat! Someone I know will be over to-morrow, sprained ankle or not, and Ambrose will manage to see him and tell him as how you're such a tight prisoner!"

The child's face brightened for a minute at the old man's words. Then, Mrs. Bartram's sneering remarks coming back to her, she shook her head decidedly.

"No, Ambrose," she said, gently. "I can never see him again! I was very wrong to go there to-day, and he will think badly of me for doing so."

"Fuddlesicks, miss!" cried Ambrose, with such energy that he nearly fell off the wheelbarrow on which he was standing. "Mr. Bonaventure's a gentleman and Mrs. Bartram's a low-minded vulgar woman. I don't know much of the young man, Miss Bab'b'a, but I've found out this—that he's just head over heels in love! I mention no names, ms'am. Good-night," and with this abrupt, mysterious remark he crept away, leaving Barbara with burning cheeks and fiercely throbbing heart.

One of the gardener's duties was to ride over to Whitechurch at a certain hour, meet the old postman, and taking charge of his master's letters, to get back as quickly as possible; Mr. Glaister by this means receiving his letters quite an hour earlier than he would otherwise have done.

The morning after Barbara's unlucky drive there was only one letter for Ambrose to receive. Yet this one dirty-looking, badly-directed envelope seemed to interest him considerably.

"London postmark!" he muttered. "Humph! must see what's in it."

Glancing cautiously around he alighted, and, leading the pony into a little hollow, proceeded to open the envelope in a very dexterous manner. A dirty scrap of paper was all it contained; but the few badly-spelt words inscribed thereon seemed very satisfying to Ambrose. They were as follows.

"Be carefull, old pal. A bloke is on yewer track—been hear and seed Levison. He's not peached yet, but don't trust him."

"John Bell."

"John Bell," mused Ambrose as he cleverly restored the paper, and closed the grimy envelope in the most scientific manner. "Who's he? Hal I remember, the old billiard marker. Now, what will Glaister do, I wonder? Go up to London, most likely. Well, if he does, Ambrose must go with him." And having settled everything to his own satisfaction, he mounted again and went swiftly on his way, bearing carefully the mysterious missive which might lead to so much—or—so little!

CHAPTER XV.

THE COMMERCIAL TRAVELER.

The strong country girl who worked under Mrs. Bartram's directions—a heavy-looking, stolid-faced country wench—was sweeping down the steps as Ambrose rode up the avenue, and stopped at once to lean lazily on

her broom and watch him tie the pony to one of the lower pillars.

"Where's master?" grunted out Ambrose as he came up the steps.

"In his study—the old wretch!" was the sullen response.

Ambrose looked at her curiously, and noticed then that her eyes were inflamed with crying, and that she wore a very defiant air.

"Have you been a catching of it, Betty?" he asked, sympathetically.

"Indeed have I!" burst out Betty, her bosom swelling with indignation. "I happened to let a tray of china fall in the poor mistress's room just now, and they're goin' on awful about it!"

"Why?" asked Ambrose, carelessly.

"Cause the smash started her like, and made her jump up quite sharp. She did look different too—seemed to be lost that silly look; and when Master went and took her and she shranked away from him and screamed awful. Mrs. Bartram looked quite white and scared, and hustled me out o' the room."

"Well?" said the man, looking all at once interested in her wandering tale.

"Well, she marched me off, I tell you. The master came too, and together they blew me up. Said I might ha' given poor mistress a serious illness, and that if she died her death 'd lie at my door. Lor!" with an hysterical gulp, "I feel quite scared like!"

"Never you mind," cried Ambrose, soothingly. "My 'pinion is the poor lady wanted rousing, and you'll have done her more good than evil."

"Oh, you really think so?" cried Betty, in relieved tones.

"Yes, I do," was the cheerful response, as he hurried away to his master's study.

"Come in," was Mr. Glaister's sharp response in answer to the gardener's knock.

Ambrose, looking keenly at him, saw that his unprepossessing face was, if anything, a little more pasty than usual, while a deep frown wrinkled his low, receding forehead.

"Letter, sir," he said, quietly, wondering all the time what excuse he could make to stay in the room and judge of the effect of that dirty scrawl on his master.

"Hal that's right," said Mr. Glaister, snatching it from him, and walking away to the window. "Put some coal on that fire before you go," he called out, as he tore open the envelope. "Summer though it is, I find it confoundedly chilly."

"It's your uneasy conscience that makes you chilly," was Ambrose's mental comment; then aloud, "Yes, sir," in a brisk, delighted tone, for Mr. Glaister had furnished him with an excuse for staying.

Slowly, bit by bit he dropped on the coal, seeing in the glass over the fire place how his master started as he read that letter, how the veins in his forehead stood out like knotted cords, how he clenched his hands; and seeing all this, and hearing the low, deep curse that burst from the man's trembling lips Ambrose was satisfied, and went on with his task.

After a time Mr. Glaister recovered his self-possession, and spoke again in his usual harsh tones to the man who was standing waiting in respectful silence for his orders.

"Bring round the phaeton at once, Ambrose," he said, sharply. "I must catch the London train at Tavistock. I have important business!"

"Yes, sir," said Ambrose, then hesitated. "When I've dray you down, sir," he said, at last, very humbly, "might I take a holiday? I've heard as how my mother's ill in Plymouth, and I thought now I've got the garden neat perhaps you'd let me off for a day."

Scanning his master's face as he preferred his request, he was rather surprised to see a look of relief steal over it, and was further astonished at the gracious words addressed to him.

"Bring the trap round and you can go at once. I'll drive myself down, and leave the phaeton at the 'Bedford.'"

"But, sir," began Ambrose, only to be temporarily stopped.

"Hush! I prefer to do that. Go at once!" Ambrose hurried away, and set to work to harness the pony, in a rather perplexed frame of mind.

"What's he up to?" he pondered. "Never mind; only let me get the same train, and not a movement of his will escape me. Ah! if he only knew the true character of his useful gardener!"

He was round at the steps in twenty minutes, and found Mr. Glaister waiting for him, a small bag in his hand and a travelling wrap thrown over his arm.

He was dressed in severely clerical black, and wore enormous blue spectacles, his hat was pulled well down over his eyes. Altogether, with hat and spectacles and bushy beard, very little of his face was to be seen.

The housekeeper had come out with him and was talking earnestly as they waited.

"I wish we'd never left America!" she muttered, savagely. "We shall be hunted down, I know!"

"Well, wouldn't anyone have thought it quite safe after thirty years?" cried the man, roughly. "I can't think who it is that is taking the matter up, the relations are all dead!"

"The devil, perhaps!" was her gloomy response. "Let's get out of the country, Sam!"

"No," he said, abruptly. "Haven't I told you that I won't leave here?"

"Very well, then," she said, indifferently, "we shall be hanged—that's all!"

"You can go if you're afraid," he sneered, his eyes fixed on the approaching phænomenon.

Her eyes flashed at that.

"A'raid!" she repeated, contemptuously, "you know I'm not!"

"Then be quiet. We are safe so far; and, at the worst, you know, we have always this!"

He tapped the breast of his coat as he spoke, and she, seeming to understand his gesture, nodded calmly.

"She seems queen to day," was her next remark.

"Yes, rather restless; that awful smash zoned her a little."

"What of the girl?" she asked, as he went down the steps.

"Oh! let her out on the verandah for a while this afternoon; but keep your eye on her all the time, and lock her up again when she comes in."

"All right. Anything else?"

"No, nothing," he replied, taking the reins from Ambrose. Then, a sudden thought seeming to strike him, he called out to her, laying peculiar emphasis on his words. "If the business turns out bad I may bring a visitor back with me—understand?"

She nodded; and he, whipping up the pony, drove rapidly away.

Mrs. Bartram did not linger in the fresh pure air. She had plenty to do inside; and besides that, the sweet summer brightness did not seem to suit her taciturn disposition. The minute her master had disappeared, she marched into the house with slow steps and thoughtful mien.

"Now for it!" muttered Ambrose, slipping down a side path, and vaulting over a low hedge on to the moor.

A little way off stood a deserted hut, and into this he disappeared, coming out again shortly after in very different guise.

The grey hair and untidy beard had vanished, a long rough coat concealed his shabby old clothes, a smart billycock replaced the tattered, disreputable hat, his hands were encased in new tan kid gloves; he carried a small oilskin-covered case with him, and looked the brisk commercial traveller to the life.

"Now to catch that animal!" he soliloquised, his eyes fixed upon a stout little pony that browsed near him in calm security. "If I don't, my game's up!"

Creeping cautiously, he reached the animal,

and with a triumphant laugh vaulted on to its back, and labouring it with his stick, sent the frightened quadruped off at a sharp gallop over the moor towards Tavistock.

"I'll do it," he muttered, as he neared the edge of the moor. "The pony was a bit lame. He will have to get some one to take her to the hotel, and, besides, we are in plenty of time for the London train."

Dismounting from his bare-backed steed at the gate leading off the moor, he sent the insignificant little animal off with a smart tap, and walked briskly down the narrow path leading out close to the station, uttering a satisfied exclamation as he saw Mr. Glaister's phænomenon being led away, while that gentleman himself was just disappearing into the station.

When the London train steamed out of Tavistock station it carried just two additional passengers—Mr. Glaister, staring out of the window and gnawing his nails; and opposite to him the commercial traveller, apparently quite absorbed in the paper he held before his face.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHO IS SHE?

Poor little Barbara found that first morning of her captivity a very tedious one.

She would have welcomed the sight of honest, stupid Betty, for she had a sympathising heart; but the housekeeper was the only one who came near her, just marching gaily in with the breakfast tray and slamming it fiercely down.

"May I go out?" asked the child, eagerly, for the fresh, sweet morning tempted her wofully.

"No, you may not. You've got this pile of sheets to hem, and they'll take you all your time. Your father has gone away on business, and left strict orders that you were not to go out until I've done all my work—and then only on to the verandah, where I can keep my eye on you."

Barbara tossed her head saucily. This unnecessarily harsh treatment, far from subduing her, had roared in her indignant heart a strong, rebellious feeling.

"I shall do them very badly," she said, looking at the ominous pile disdainfully.

"Then you won't go out at all," retorted Mrs. Bartram, marching out and locking the door.

"I shan't touch the horrid things!" exclaimed Barbara, passionately, throwing herself into a low chair and tapping the floor impatiently with her foot. "Oh yes, I will, though!" jumping up suddenly and seizing her work-basket. "I shall be stiled if I don't go out, and—and I want to see Ambrose—he's a nice old man."

With a little conscious laugh and a faint blush she went to work, turning away from the sunny old garden so that she should not be tempted to look out; and so diligently did she labour, that by dinner-time her task was accomplished, and she was at liberty to throw herself into her favourite, low chair, and give herself up entirely to the strange, delicious thoughts that would come and take possession of her heart.

"Ambrose said he'd be here to-day," she murmured, leaning her chin on her hand and gazing thoughtfully out in the direction of the moorland gate, "and I must not see him. Oh, no I!" decisively. "Twas horrid of me! I can never look him in the face again! And you," wistfully, "how I should like to see him! Ah!" springing up, "could I draw his face, I wonder? I used to be rather clever at school in catching likenesses."

To think was to act, with impulsive Barbara. She flew over to a desk, found a sheet of drawing-paper and a pencil, and was soon absorbed in her pleasing task.

With quick, clever fingers she used the pencil, and laughed a little pleased laugh as—in a few minutes—Guy Bouverie's handsome young face smiled back at her from the paper.

In the midst of her happy musing she heard slow, heavy steps approaching; the key turned and the door was flung open.

"That hateful woman!" she muttered, snatching up her precious paper and holding it behind her. But, to her intense relief, Betty's honest face and stampy figure appeared. "Where's Mrs. Bartram?" whispered Barbara, as Betty put down the tray and stood smiling at her, sympathetically.

Betty grinned.

"She were a comin', Miss Barbara, but I think she found she couldn't hold a tray steady."

"What! has she—" began the girl, in disgusted tones.

Betty nodded, as if perfectly understanding.

"All morning, miss. Can't stand steady now. She alus does it when master's away," said the maid, in a rapid whisper.

Barbara looked frightened as well as angry.

"Where is she, Betty?"

"With your ma, miss; and when you've done your dinner, she says, you're to go and sit wit' the mistress a bit."

"Me!" cried Barbara, shrinking; then, ashamed, of her momentary cowardice.

"Yes, yes, Betty; I'll be ready soon." Then suddenly remembering the paper she held, she brought it slowly forward, her mind full of doubt. Should she show it to Betty? Yes, she would; that honest, stupid girl would only think it a fancy picture, and she was longing to hear someone praise it.

"Look, Betty!" she said, in quick, soft tones, as Betty turned away. "I have been drawing this! Do you think it's handsome face?"

She listened anxiously for Betty's verdict, watching the damsel's stolid face as she stared at the paper.

"Lor', miss!" was the startling exclamation. "It's very like him!"

Barbara blushed brilliantly.

"Like whom?" she asked, hypocritically.

"The gentleman as is sitting by the little green gate waiting for a peep at you," promptly responded Betty. "Ambrose told me all about him. And please, Miss Barbara," hurrying out her words, in fear lest she should be called, "he speaks to me and give me a ten shillin' piece. He asked where you was, so I just told him how they'd treated you, miss, and, oh, dear! he looked as black as thunder and swored awful!"

"Did he?" cried Barbara, laughing and blushing, not a bit shocked, but the rather comforted in that Guy had lost his temper on her account.

"Yes, miss, and he says as how he'll stay there till he sees you."

"That's foolish," remarked the young lady with a little dignified air. "I would not see him. And besides," dropping the dignity. "I am only to walk on the verandah, and Mrs. Bartram will watch me all the time."

"Not she!" retorted Betty, significantly, "she'll be asleep all afternoon."

"Betty!" cried the housekeeper's deep voice. "Come down!"

"Yes, ma'am," answered Betty, promptly, and with a reassuring nod for her young mistress she hastened away, carefully locking the door after her.

When Barbara rang her bell a little later on, Mrs. Bartram herself appeared, and the girl, glancing keenly at her, saw that Betty's shrewd conjectures were quite correct. Her face was fearfully flushed, her utterance thick and unsteady—she had been drinking deeply.

"Come and sit with your mother for an hour while I lie down," she stammered out. "You'll only have to sit and watch her, for she's asleep. And bring your hat with you—you can go out when she's up."

In great wonder, for she had never been left alone with the invalid before, her father always accompanying her in her rare visits, the girl silently obeyed the peremptory command, and followed the woman's uncer-



[CREEPING CAUTIOUSLY, AMBROSE REACHED THE ANIMAL, AND WITH A TRIUMPHANT LAUGH, VAULTED ON TO ITS BACK.]

tain footsteps along the sunny passage, and in at the heavy swinging door that shut off the invalid's apartments from the rest of the house.

These rooms were situated at the back of the building, looking out on an old unused courtyard, and Barbara had often indignantly wondered why such dreary rooms should have been chosen for her poor afflicted mother.

They were on the second story, but out of the bedroom a low, oaken door, hidden by a heavy curtain, opened on to a steep flight of steps leading straight down into the dismal courtyard. To day the blinds were all drawn down, the room being, in consequence, in a state of semi-darkness, yet light enough for Barbara to distinguish her mother's fearfully emaciated figure lying motionless on a sofa drawn up beside the fireplace, in which a small log was burning with a cheerful crackling noise.

"Sit quite still and don't waken her," muttered Mrs. Bartram, thickly. "In an hour I'll be back."

Barbara nodded, and dropped into a low chair close beside her mother, keeping perfectly still until the housekeeper with heavy, stumbling steps had left the room. Then eagerly, for never before had she been able to scrutinise the poor haggard face so closely, she fell on her knees beside the sofa and looked at the sleeper intently.

The eyes were closed, she could not see them, but she could gaze upon the pallid face with its hollow cheeks, weary, pain-drawn lips, and the deep, deep shadows that lay under the closed eyelids, the snow-white silky hair that rolled off the beautifully-shaped forehead, the fair white neck and the finely-shaped hands.

"Poor mother!" thought the girl, with supreme pity. "She must have been very pretty. Is it my father's fault that she wears this look of utter misery?"

She took the thin hand in hers and stroked

it gently, but as she did so her eyes fell on the third finger, and involuntarily she cried aloud.—

"Why, she has no wedding-ring!"

Her voice seemed to influence the quiet sleeper. She moved restlessly, moaned a little, then the eyelids were slowly raised, and a pair of sweet pathetic blue eyes gazed into Barbara's. She smiled as if well pleased to see the girl's pretty face, and lay quite still, never moving her eyes away.

"Speak to me, mother! Tell me you love me!" cried the girl, eagerly. "Oh! I have never yet heard your voice!"

The only answer to this entreaty was a mournful shake of the head; but suddenly her mother started up and snatched at something hanging to Barbara's watch-chain.

The girl, following the sudden movement, saw that it was her pencil-case that had attracted the invalid's notice.

Anxious to humour her, she quickly detached it from the chain and placed it in the outstretched hand.

On the table by the sofa lay a piece of white paper that had contained grapes; this the woman snatched up, wrote on it rapidly and passed it to the astonished girl, who, watching her sudden actions, was feeling a little bit afraid.

Mechanically she took the paper and read the few trembling words thereon inscribed.

"I am dumb and have always been so," she read with unutterable astonishment.

"But," began Barbara, looking up and breaking off, as she saw the pencil held out to her entreatingly. Quickly comprehending, she took it and wrote.—

"They never said so. Father told me you only spoke to him."

An angry flush came over the invalid's cheek as she read this. Hurriedly she wrote and pushed the paper back.

"Tis a lie!" read the girl. "I have been always dumb."

Barbara stared at her in utter surprise. What next should she read on that paper? Not long had she to wonder. Once again it was taken from her, once again it was pushed into her hand, and eagerly she bent to read.

"My child," it ran, "do not call him that. He is not your father. I am not your mother."

"Who then—" Barbara began to write, when a faint rustle in the next room caught her quick ear.

She held up her hand with a warning gesture and sank into the low chair again. One quick glance she gave at the invalid, and saw with gladness that she had understood her warning gesture.

The snowy head lay peacefully back on the pillows, the eyes were once more closed in sleep. With hands tightly clenching her precious scrap of paper, and heart beating loudly, Barbara leaned her head back and closed her eyes too.

Presently the door was softly opened, and, with unsteady step and flushed face, Mrs. Bartram crossed the room and laid her hand on the girl's shoulder.

"What!" she cried, coming so close to Barbara that her hot, spirit-laden breath fanned the pure, fresh cheek, "is this how you wash?"

The girl managed to give a very natural start.

"Was I asleep?" she said, gazing about her in a dazed way. "Ah, well! it is this dark room and the hot afternoon."

Mrs. Bartram sniffed disdainfully, and went and bent over the quiet sleeper.

Barbara's heart beat furiously again. The invalid, she knew, still held her little pencil-case. If those argus eyes should see it, what might not happen?

She almost heaved a sigh of relief as the housekeeper turned away, and stumbled over to a window to draw up the blind.

(To be continued.)



[CLIFTON SNATCHED THE CANDLESTICK FROM THE SQUIRE, AND, WITH BRUTE FORCE, RUBLED THE POOR OLD MAN TO THE GROUND.]

A LATE ATONEMENT.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Squire had retired early. Everything seemed playing into Arline's hands, for the butler, an old and faithful servant, had obtained leave of absence to visit a sick daughter.

The footmen, who filled his place, were young, and not so likely to be aroused, even if they did hear footsteps about the house; besides, their quarters were far removed from the main wing in which both the grand staircase and the library were situated.

By eleven o'clock every sound had died away. A great stillness had settled on the house, and Arline, creeping downstairs barefooted to the boudoir—where she was to await her husband's signal—decided that sleep had certainly already taken all the household under his protection.

She wore a loose negligee of pale pink cashmere trimmed with swan's down. Her black eyes gleamed with excitement, and her cheeks were flushed.

She knew perfectly she was running a terrible risk. If Clifton's entrance into the house were discovered, everyone would know she was his confidante; but Arline had staked all on the success of her exploit.

Horace was to possess himself of some blank cheques from the Squire's cheque-book. Arline could furnish him with letters bearing the well-known signature, "James Rushton," and the rent would be easy. They had decided to abstract three cheques, as one would not be sufficient lest any accident should attend the forger's first attempt.

Mr. Rushton, like many old people, was methodical to a degree. Saturday morning was his time for signing cheques; rarely, indeed, did he open his cheque book on any other day. Therefore, for seven whole days, that is till Saturday came round again, they were safe from detection provided only that

Horace Clifton's fatal talent was equal to the demand upon it.

Arline sat in the beautifully-furnished boudoir, trying hard to silence the reproofs of her conscience.

She told herself that she was forced to this step—that only so could she gain the fortune promised by Hester Dixon—that for her husband's sake she could not neglect such a splendid chance.

Again and again she mentally repeated these arguments, but they were not quite effectual. She sat on thorns. The slightest sound, such as the moaning of the wind, the rustling of the leaves in the trees, filled her with terror.

She sat in a misery of apprehension, and never in her whole life had time passed so slowly as while she waited for her husband's signal.

It came at last. A small pebble struck the window sharply with a whirring sound, which made Arline jump off her chair in alarm, though it was just what she had been expecting. She waited five minutes to make sure no one else had heard it and raised an alarm. Then she went slowly down the grand oaken staircase, carrying in one hand a silver lamp, while in the other she held up the train of her soft pink draperies.

Her heart beat so loudly she could hear it even while she slipped the heavy bolts and turned the ponderous key in the lock. It was done at last.

Clifton entered the house, closed the door noiselessly, took the lamp from his wife's hand in perfect silence, then, with a motion of his hand, signed to her to lead the way to the library.

It was at the farther end of the hall, and when they had once gained it, Arline felt that the more pressing danger was over.

She sank almost fainting on a chair, and Clifton, believing that in another moment she would swoon, took a small flask from his pocket, and made her swallow a little of the brandy it contained.

"It will never do to show the white feather now," he whispered; "you must rouse yourself Arline, for your own sake, if not for mine."

The scene in itself was weird enough to alarm a nervous woman. The vast library—twenty feet by thirty—was in utter darkness save for the little space illuminated by Arline's silver lamp. Clifton deposited this on the table, and then turned sharply towards his wife.

"We must set to work at once, delays are dangerous. Where does he keep his cheque-book?"

She pointed to a pedestal table of carved oak with drawers on either side.

"The right-hand top drawer."

"Good!"

Clifton sat down in the Squire's special chair, an act which jarred against Arline's every instinct. She could plot to rob and defraud her kind old father, but yet it seemed to her almost sacrilegio to see her husband, the ex-convict, in James Rushton's seat. Horace, however, never noticed how she shuddered, he took from his pocket a screw-driver and the other implements used for breaking locks after the most approved fashion, also a master-key which he hoped would be effectual, as its use would entail far less time and leave far less risk of discovery than if he were reduced to picking the lock. The key acted like magic, and the drawer was opened.

The cheque-book was the first thing Clifton noticed. It lay on the top. Carefully tearing out three cheques near the end, he put them in his pocket and replaced the book where he found it.

Arline drew a sigh of relief.

"You will go now?" she breathed. "Oh, make haste, I implore you."

"There's no hurry," returned Clifton, coolly. "We may as well see if there's anything else that will assist us," and, to his wife's dismay, he calmly took up a bundle of

papers endorsed "Concerning Freda," and proceeded to examine them.

"If you would only go!" pleaded Arline, getting almost desperate at his delay.

"There's no danger. Don't you see, my dear, if we can prove your sister's death when Mrs. Dixon comes to see if you accept the terms, you will be the sole heiress of what fortune exists."

"I can't bear it. It's prying into papa's secrets."

"His secrets may be as useful to us as his cheque-book. Be quiet and hold your tongue or you'll rouse the household yet."

He deliberately took up the first paper, a little yellow with age, and read it through, slightly lifting his brows as he did so, as though the contents surprised him. A second shared the same fate. Then came three long narrow slips of paper, evidently formal certificates of some nature.

Mr. Clifton seemed more and more interested.

"Come here, Arline; read this! We need not be afraid of your sister's claims on Mr. Rushton's will; she was not his daughter at all!"

He gave her the first letter. It was a passionate loving farewell addressed by the girl Freda to her mother on the eve of her leaving home to be married to the man of her choice. There was nothing undutiful or rebellious in the letter, nay, it contained a passionate prayer for forgiveness; but there were expressions in it which told that Clifton's surmise was perfectly correct.

"You will not miss me, mother," wrote the poor girl, "at least, not for long. You have two other children whom your husband loves, while from the moment of your marriage he has hated me for my father's sake. Bob and Baby are Rushtons; I am not, and I never could be. The very idea of dropping my dead father's name and being called by a stranger's was odious to me. Oh, mother, we were happy in our days of poverty, when you were not afraid to love your little Dot, and trusted me. Mr. Rushton never liked me, and I have always felt he robbed me of my mother just as he had robbed me of my name.

"George wants me, mother, and you do not. He loves me dearly, and I love him, so that we are sure to be happy even if it is an uphill struggle. I'd have dearly liked to take your blessing with me, mother, to feel you thought kindly of me in my new life; but my stepfather would be angry with you if he thought you knew, so I'm stealing away without one good bye word, one last kiss. Don't forget me, mother. Keep a corner in your heart for your first born,

"Dot."

Bewildered, Arline put out her hand for the next letter; it was very short, and, if anything, more pathetic than the first.

"Sir,—

"I am dying, and the fact that very soon my wife and children will be at the mercy of the cold world induces me to write to you in the faint hope that you will befriend them in the future.

"Freda knows nothing of this letter. She would not let me sue to you for help; but when I am dead and the cause of your offence removed, it is possible that your heart may soften towards her.—I am, sir,

"Your obedient servant,

"GEORGE ROSS."

The address of some London lodgings was appended. There was no envelope to the letter, and no date beyond June 17th, so that it was impossible to guess how many years it had lain in the Squire's drawers. The other papers were the certificates of Freda's marriage and of her children's birth, but somehow—probably James Rushton—had carefully obliterated in both the maiden name of Arline's sister. She had evidently shaken off

Mr. Rushton's and been married in that of her own father, but what that name had been it was impossible to tell.

Arline looked at the later certificates, which both bore the same date.

"They must be twins," she said, slowly; "fancy me with twin nieces of twenty!"

"You are never likely to see them," returned Clifton. "Arline, don't you see what this proves?"

He had replaced the papers in their package and restored it to the drawer, which he locked, and saw every sign of the cruel fraud put away. To watch the two sitting in the library now, you might have thought their design no more felonious than that of securing a *tithe-free* from observation.

"I don't understand," said Arline, faintly.

"It is clear enough. You, and you only, are the Squire's heiress. If your sister was found tomorrow and he died intestate she could not touch a penny of his money, that is why he refuses to make his will. He knows that the moment anything happens to him all will be yours."

"But what about Digby Rushton?" persisted Arline. "Why should my father disclaim he will have the heir. Remember, Horace, he has not only told me so, he has announced it to all the neighbours and every servant in the house. Of the strength of his future inheritance Digby has given up his appointment."

"A beggarly four hundred a year."

"Five hundred," corrected Arline.

"Well, within struck of his pen your father could put that all right. No, I'm sure my idea is right. The Squire has grown elated at your marrying, and fearing you do not favour any of your suitors, made up his mind to find a husband for you himself. He knows your love for Digby Pace, and he has invented this fable about its passing to young Rushton to force you to become his wife."

"It is not like papa," she objected. "He never deceived me in his life."

"Hem!" said Clifton, meaningfully, "how about your sister? Has he not brought you up to believe she was his own child? Has he not allowed both you and your mother to think he had heard nothing of her since her marriage?"

Arline was silenced; if not convinced. Another fear seized her. In his interesting discovery Clifton had forgotten the flight of time. It was long past one when they entered the library, for his signal had come late. It seemed to her they had been hours over their guilty task.

"You must go now or you will be discovered. You can't tell in this room because of the shutters, but it must be nearly sun-rise."

"It is just four," said Clifton, taking the lamp over to the chimney-piece where stood a large clock in a carved oak case. "It will strike in another moment."

As he spoke, the first of the four strokes fell on their ears, the others followed in slow succession. Perhaps their sound prevented the husband and wife from hearing the sound of footsteps. Anyway, the first warning they had of being disturbed was the opening of the door of the library which stood directly opposite to the table near which they were talking.

Quick as thought Clifton extinguished the silver lamp, throwing the part of the room where they were into utter darkness.

They could see now it was the Squire himself approaching. He carried a candlestick in his hand and was attired in a crimson dressing-gown. Probably he had come in search of a book to beguile his wakeful hours, but this view never dawned on the guilty pair. Both believed James Rushton had been aroused by the sound of voices, and had come down to investigate the cause.

"All is lost!" said Arline to her husband, in a hopeless whisper. "Oh! why did you linger so? I told you it was not safe."

"Silence!" hissed Horace Clifton, angrily;

then he pushed her behind the heavy curtains of the window. Only just in time, for the Squire, who had been examining the books on a shelf near the door, had now turned in their direction.

Quick as thought Clifton snatched the candlestick from him and put it out, then with brute force he hurried the poor old man to the ground and rushed from the room, followed by Arline.

"You have killed him!"

"I have done nothing of the sort. Let me out; then go back to him, and in ten minutes all the household. The servants will be like you were aroused from sleep by Mr. Rushton's cries. Play your cards shrewdly, and all will be well."

He was gone!

There was no time to think. The part she had to play was forced on her. There must have been something ominous and inhuman about the nature of this beautiful woman, for even at that moment her thoughts were not of her father's possible suffering, but that it Clifton's blow passed fatal, the wealth she had longed for would be hers.

Even now she did not hurry to the Squire's assistance, but went upstairs to her own room, opened the bed, and by a few deft touches made it appear that it had been slept in; then she went to the end of the corridor where hung a large bell communicating with the servants' quarters, and never used save in cases of serious illness. She pealed this with all her force and then waited.

The effect was magical. In five minutes, Mrs. Hobbs, in hasty disarray, appeared; other sleepy-looking servants followed.

Arline clung to the housekeeper's arm as though panic-stricken.

"Something has happened to my father, Hobbs. I heard him scream."

"Goodness, Miss Arline!" cried the worthy Hobbs. "I hope you're mistaken. There's a bell near the master's bed-head, which rings straight into William's room, he'd safe to have rung it if he was ill."

William, the valet, a quiet, rather superior young man, did not wait to ask another question, but rushed in the direction of his master's room.

Arline went on nervously,—

"I heard the sound of voices raised, and I was just going downstairs myself when I heard papa scream, and then I was too upset to move."

Back came William.

"The master's not in his room," he said, gravely. "Where did the sound of his scream come from, ma'am?"

"Downstairs."

Down they fled—a crowd of servants—Arline, whiter than marble, bringing up the rear.

The library door stood open, which made William begin his search there.

"Here's the Squire," said the valet, in an awestruck voice. "He's had an accident, I think, and fallen down."

The Squire was lying full length on the floor. His eyes were closed, his form was motionless; his face had a white set look. Was he dead, or only stunned? That was the question in all minds.

William, leant down, and placed his hand to his master's left side.

Arline waited in a tumult of anxiety to hear if he could feel the beatings of her father's heart.

CHAPTER XIV.

"I THINK it is very strange I have heard nothing from Digby Pace."

The speaker was Digby Rushton. He was sitting at breakfast with his mother, about a fortnight after his arrival at Stingham. The postman had just been, and it was as he examined the papers for himself that the young man made this remark.

"The Squire was always peculiar," said

Mrs. Rushton, evenly. "When people get old, Digby, they are not fond of letter-writing."

"But, mother, I have written to my cousin three times, and my last letter required an answer."

"Do you think you can have offended him, Digby?" asked the widow, rather anxiously.

"I should think he was the last person in the world to take groundless offence, and I am sure I have given him no cause."

"What was there in your letter to require an answer, Digby?"

"I told the Squire I could not induce you to live in Herfordshire, so I should only require a bachelor's cottage; and I asked him if he knew of a small house at Kesterton. I said I thought of prolonging my stay here to a month, and that you were most anxious to make his acquaintance if he would come to us for a few days—either with or without his daughter."

Mrs. Rushton looked perturbed.

"He ought to have written, Digby. It is treating us like poor relations to do otherwise."

Digby hesitated.

"Mother, the Squire could not do that, he is consideration itself. I begin to think he must be ill."

"Then Arline would have written."

"I don't fancy Arline likes me, mother."

"Oh! Digby," and there was no mistaking the old lady's affection now, "Do you know, I had hoped so much that you would marry her."

"And the Squire told me it was the wish of his heart. Arline and I must be two very contrary people, mother, to disappoint our respective parents."

"Is there no chance of it, Digby?"

"I don't believe, under any circumstances, Arline Rushton would listen to me; and I tell you plainly, mother, I would not marry her if she were ten times as handsome."

Mrs. Rushton sighed.

"You are the last of all my sons, Digby, and I always hoped you would marry."

He smiled.

"Well, mother, why not go on hoping? I don't think thirty-two is such a vast age, that my single state is past remedy."

"You could not marry anyone but Arline."

"Good gracious! why not?"

"Because, if her father has set his heart on it, he would perhaps cut off your allowance if you chose another wife, and you know you have given up your appointment to please him."

Digby winced; it was so true.

"I don't think the Squire would take a mean advantage of me like that, mother. It doesn't bear from him in a day or two, I think I shall go back to Digby Place for one night, and then finish my visit here afterwards. If I am to begin work as his agent in September, there are several things that ought to be settled first."

"This is only July, Digby."

"And Fenton is still here. He came for a day or two, and shows no signs of going even after a fortnight. Don't you feel flattered, mother?"

Mrs. Rushton smiled.

"He doesn't stay for the sake of enjoying my society, my dear."

"Well, I can only say that whenever I return from an afternoon's fishing, I find Ronald seated in your drawing room, drinking tea."

"And he is very welcome," said Mrs. Rushton, fluently. "I like Ronald Fenton very much. I am sure he will make an excellent husband, and as he is rich, and his own master, my little Elfy's being penniless, won't be any difficulty."

Digby stared.

He had been at Slingham a fortnight; he had met Elfy Ross every day, and thought her the loveliest girl he had ever seen, and yet the idea of her marrying his old comrade was intensely distasteful to him.

"That's absurd, you matchmaking old

lady," he answered, after just a moment's hesitation. "Why, Fenton isn't a marrying man for one thing, and he is twice Miss Elfy's age for another!"

"A good wife is just what he wants," persisted Mrs. Rushton; "and I don't call fourteen years a great disparity. Elfy is nearly twenty."

Digby dropped the conversation, as though he did not find it particularly interesting.

He went out earlier than usual, and strolling to the Vicarage, found Mrs. Bolton in the garden, surrounded by the children.

"I have given Miss Ross a week's holiday," Mabel said, pleasantly. "It really is too hot for learning, and I thought both she and the chicks would be better for a rest."

"And how is she going to spend it?"

"I don't know about to-day. Mr. Fenton has hired a very comfortable waggonette, and he proposes to take us all for a picnic tomorrow."

Down went the corners of Digby's mouth.

"I can't think why he stays here so long."

Mabel laughed at his discomfiture.

"Why, he told me you had advised him to spend the summer in the country; and he is such help to Charles!"

"He's a good fellow," admitted Digby; "but hardly the kind for picnics and young ladies. Ronald is not a ladies' man."

"Isn't he? I have heard he was in great request with all the ladies of his regiment!"

"Mrs. Bolton, I want to speak to you."

"Well, you are speaking to me, aren't you?" said Mabel, brightly; then seeing from his frown he was in no mood for bantering, she said, gravely, "Please tell me if there is anything I can do for you. You and Charles are such old friends, Mr. Rushton, that I can't look on you as a mere acquaintance."

"My mother declares Fenton stays here because he is in love with Miss Ross. Now, do you think there is anything in it?"

"Charles says just the same thing. It's too bad of him and Mrs. Rushton to develop a taste for matchmaking, isn't it?"

"Do, please, be serious," pleaded Digby. "You don't know what it all means to me."

"You want me to tell you what I think?" said the happy young wife, kindly. "Well, Mr. Fenton never talks to me about himself, and I don't believe he knows that he has lost his heart; still from the way I've seen him look at her, I rather think the mischief's done. I found him in the church the other day all alone. He confessed he'd been there an hour, and I believe the fact that Miss Ross was practising on the organ for Sunday accounted for it. He couldn't see her, but he knew she was there."

Digby opened his eyes.

"I didn't know she played the organ. I thought her sister did that."

A funny little smile crossed Mrs. Bolton's face as she asked,—

"Can we be talking at cross purposes, Mr. Rushton? The sisters are twins, you know. The elder is our organist."

"Just so—Mona."

"Precisely. And if Mr. Fenton has any rash dreams connected with the tenants of Mulberry Cottage, depend upon it the heroine of them is Mona."

"My mother—"

"Your mother is wrapped up in Elfy, and couldn't understand anyone thinking of her sister while she was by."

"But Fenton is always at the Grey House.

I find him there every afternoon drinking tea, like an old woman."

"Heaps of people drink tea besides old women," remonstrated Mabel Bolton. "Besides, as a matter of fact, don't you generally find that Mona is there too?"

"But—"

"I happen to know that she has a standing invitation from your mother to drop in at the Grey House if her lessons take her anywhere in that neighbourhood about four o'clock."

"Oh!"

"Do you feel easier for this conversation?"

"I do."

"Perhaps you think the Vicar a truer prophet even than Mrs. Rushton?"

"Bolton always was no end of a fellow."

The wife smiled at this meed of praise.

"Am I to infer you contemplate robbery, Mr. Rushton?" she asked, quietly.

"Robbery!"

"I assure you my small daughters would regard it as nothing less if they lost their governess."

"Where is she?" asked Digby, with the blanket disregard of Mabel's question, and an indiscriminate use of the personal pronoun, which proved him to be very far gone indeed."

"Well, as she isn't here, I rather conclude she is at home. And, Mr. Rushton, I will be magnanimous and give you some valuable information. Mona's lessons keep her away from home on Mondays till twelve o'clock."

Digby walked off. He had drifted into love as madly and irreversibly as man could drift. Years ago he had been jilted by a mercenary coquette; but as he had a sound, wholesome nature, and a frank, generous temper, and though his disappointment had made him old and graver beyond his years, it had not spoilt his life nor soured his disposition.

He had never thought all women must be false because one had deceived him. He had always believed he should never love again; but Elfy's blue eyes had touched his heart from their first meeting, and his mother's prophecy that she would marry Fenton had opened Digby's eyes to his own secret.

He loved this pretty, penniless child, who had not a powerful friend or rich relation in the world. He, Squire Rushton's heir, the future master of Digby Place, had lost his heart to a little golden-headed maiden, who was quite content to live in a five-roomed cottage, and work tolerably hard for twenty pounds a year.

"She is rightly called Elfy, for she is just like a fairy," decided Digby as he reached the cottage. "Well, she shall be my fairy queen if only she will be content to reign over my heart!"

Mulberry Cottage was a very homely abode; the front door led straight into the parlour, and, as it stood open this hot day, Digby did not have the trouble of knocking. He could see Elfy daintily stitching away in a low chair close to the door, and he walked in with-out the least form or ceremony.

"Have you brought me a message from Mrs. Rushton?" asked Elfy, when their first greetings were over. "Is she quite well today?"

"Perfectly, thank you. No, she didn't mention any message. I didn't know when I left home I was coming. I thought you were generally at the Vicarage in the mornings."

"I am having a week's holiday, and to day

is my first morning at home."

"Don't you hate teaching?"

Elfy smiled.

"I don't adore it. But teaching at the Vicarage is not like ordinary teaching. They are all so nice and so kind to me."

"I should think everyone would be kind to you," said Rushton, slowly.

Elfy coloured. It was different talking to him in his mother's drawing room to entertaining him alone in her own parlour, and she never felt quite at her ease with Digby Rush-ton. She could never forget the story of his wrecked hopes.

Digby had closed the door on entering the little room. Perhaps he did not like paying visits in the view of all the passers down the village street; or perhaps he did it unconsciously, not being accustomed to houses without some attempt at hall or passage.

A strange silence had crept over the two; at last Elfy asked, timidly.—

"Shall you stay much longer at Slingham?"

"I don't know. I shall be very sorry to go; but I may have to return to Kesterton. I'm afraid I shall never like Hertfordshire so well as Sussex. You see, I was born here, and every part of the little place has associations for me."

"Yes, I wondered you could bear to come back," said Elfy; then seeing the words implied a knowledge of his secret, she blushed crimson.

"So some one has told you my story," he said, gravely, "and you have been pitying me?"

"I could not help it. It seemed so hard."

"It was a blow at the time," he admitted; "but the wound has been cured for years. Don't you see, Elfy, one may mourn a dead love, but not a false one. The very consciousness one's idol is but brass stops regret for it!"

Dead silence. Elfy felt hot and cold by turns. She was angry with herself for blushing, and yet powerless to help it.

"Elfy," said Digby Rushton, suddenly, "you don't think that because I made a mistake once, and gave my love to one unworthy of it, my heart must be closed for ever to all tender hopes. Dear, from the moment I saw your face I knew I could forgive Mr. Warren fully and freely for rivalling me long ago. The old wound was healed before ever I returned to Slingham; but, dear, a new one bitterer and more painful will rankle at my heart if I fail to win you. I cannot give you a boy's first impulsive affection; but, dear, the warm, strong love of my manhood is yours, and yours only. I have known you but a little while, but I could not keep my secret. Elfy, I will wait for you as Jacob did for Rachel, if only you will promise to love me in the end!"

The girl looked into his face, and something she saw shining in his eyes made her own droop before that earnest gaze; then she said, brokenly,—

"You don't know what you ask, Mr. Rushton. I am not fit to be a great lady. Until I came here I had known no home but a dreary back street in Kennington; I have not a grand relation in the world. Your mother and all your friends would be angry if—if you chose me!"

"But I have chosen you, sweetheart," said Digby, "so, you see, the mischief is done; and, dear, your scruples won't stand a moment. You are a gentlewoman, my mother herself is no more. She loves you dearly already, and I am sure she will welcome you as her daughter. Great relations and rich friends are not what I want, dear, in my wife, but a heart that will love me and be my own."

"You know," whispered Elfy, "my father died before I could remember, and we have always been poor."

"Well, my darling," he said, cheerfully "you won't be either rich or great at present. So long as my cousin lives I shall have no more than the amount I received abroad. As you know, I have to help my mother, so there will be plenty of room for you to practise economy if that makes you happy. But, my Elfy, you are keeping me in suspense all this time; won't you look up, and promise you will try to love me?"

"But I love you now," she whispered. "I could not help it. You see, when Mrs. Belton told us your story I was so sorry for you, and then when you came!"—

"Found pity was akin to love," said Digby, finishing her sentence. "Then, sweetheart, I am indeed, fortunate. I shall go home and tell my mother you have promised to make me happy."

"She will be very angry."

"I don't think so—surprised, she may be, perhaps, for she has made up her mind that you are to be the future Mrs. Fenton!"

The surprise in Elfy's face was genuine enough to dispel any fear of the most jealous lover.

"Why, he hardly ever speaks to me. He and Mona have one or two little secrets they

are always discussing. I fancy Mr. Fenton is interested in some family where Mona used to teach, and that makes a link between them."

"And now," said Digby, very decidedly, "you must make me another promise, Elfy. You won't let Mona or anyone else persuade you to give me up."

"Mona wouldn't try."

"Listen, Elfy," said her lover, fondly, "we trust each other, don't we, dear? so we shall have no secrets. You know I love you better than the whole world. Promise me no one shall come between us."

She answered him by a question.

"Digby, are you afraid your mother will be so angry she will try to part us?"

"No, dear; my mother, Heaven bless her, is not mercenary. She married for love herself, and will be glad for me to do the same. I will be quite frank with you, darling. The only person I fear may be displeased at our engagement is my cousin."

"Squire Rushton?"

"Yes; he has not the slightest right to interfere with me, but—I would rather tell you this myself—he has one only daughter, and, as she cannot inherit Digby Place herself, he has taken up the fancy that it would be a good thing if she married me, and lived on in her old home as my wife—you foolish child! I do believe you are crying."

"Because I have spoilt your life—perhaps but for me you would have married Miss Rushton."

"My darling, I would not have married Arline had I never seen your face. I can't explain it to you, dear, I can't give you any proof but my bare word; but she is not a good woman; and, besides, had I been willing to marry her ever so, there is another barrier. She hates me with every fibre of her heart."

"Oh!" with a sigh of relief.

"So you see, dear, even if you consented to send me to the rightabout, I should never marry Arline Rushton. I don't believe the Squire would try to part us; but if he does, Elfy dear, please remember you have promised to be true to me in spite of all the remonstrances in the world."

"I will be true to you while I live," she whispered. "Oh, Digby, it seems so wonderful that you should love me."

"It is a fact nevertheless, dear, and you—
you love me a little?"

"More than a little. Oh, Digby, I wish there was some way I could prove my love and show you how much I care for you."

Neither of them guessed how soon the way would come.

"I must go," said Digby. "I will come and see your sister to-morrow. I shall tell my mother not to expect you this afternoon, for you must not come to the Grey House until she has been here to tell you how gladly she welcomes you as my betrothed."

"I hope she will come."

"She will come, and now, Elfy, remember, nothing is to part us. You are to be true to me for always."

"Through cloud and sunshine, in life and death," breathed Elfy. He took her in his arms and kissed her. Then with a murmured blessing he said good-bye, and went out into the village street. But the clouds were nearer than he dreamed of; before he had gone a hundred yards he was stopped by a portly stranger in a black suit who was attended by the one constable of Slingham."

"In the Queen's name!" said the latter, in delight at his importance, qualified by a regret that the first of the "quality" he had arrested should be the most popular man in Slingham.

"I don't understand!" said Digby, wondering if it was a hoax. "Have you been drinking, Jones?"

"I'm a teetotaller, sir," said Jones, in an aggrieved tone, while the man in black said placidly,—

"It's all right, my dear sir, the warrant's quite in form. You are arrested on a charge

of forgery, and until you can prove your innocence you must consider yourself my prisoner."

(To be continued.)

DECIMA'S ORDEAL.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ALICE MORTIMER stood staring at Mrs. Bruce dully, a wild horror in her eyes that was indescribable. Had her hideous premonitions so soon proved to be a reality, then?

There was the letter in the woman's hand, the letter that she knew contained the truth that she so much feared to hear. An icy perspiration stood upon her brow and about her set mouth. What should she do?

And then the indecision, the weakness of disbelief seemed to leave her, and the old defiance returned. She would not listen to the stories against this betrothed husband of hers, against whom she had not the right to hear. She drew herself up proudly and looked the suffering woman unflinchingly in the eye.

"I regret that you have done this!" she said, coldly. "I have always liked you. I have tried in every way that lay in my power to make your life a happier one. I have done what I could for you disinterestedly. There was no expected reward, no desire for one, but I did not expect such ingratitude. Leave my presence."

She loathed herself for her cruelty, her selfishness, when she saw the look of positive anguish that crossed Mrs. Bruce's face. The poor woman drew back, her sensitive lip quivered, then a dogged determination blanched her already ghastly face.

"No!" she cried, "I cannot go until I have proven to you that what I have said is the truth. You are too much my friend for me to allow you to sacrifice yourself in any way, and I cannot do it, even if my punishment for speaking the truth is that I am never to see you again. You shall hear me!"

"I tell you that I will not! Do you think that I should accept your word in preference to that of my husband that is to be? Do you think that I should allow you to speak falsely of him to me?"

"I do not ask you to accept my word. I ask you to accept only the message that has come to me from the dead. I ask you only to listen to the words that Decima herself has spoken."

There was a solemnity about the tone that was most impressive.

Miss Mortimer shivered. For a moment she closed her eyes as if to gain strength. Her hand was half extended as if she would take the letter, then dropped helplessly by her side. When she opened her eyes all her strength seemed to have vanished; but in its stead was a wild pleading that was infinitely pitiful.

"Don't!" she cried, hoarsely. "You don't know what I am suffering. Have you never loved, that you can come here to me with this cruel story? I have tried to be your friend. Why could you not have let me have my little happiness in exchange?"

Tears came to Mrs. Bruce's eyes.

"Oh, child, you don't know what you are saying," she exclaimed, huskily. "You don't understand what the future would have brought you. Do you think it would have contained any happiness after you had discovered, as you would have been forced to do sooner or later, that you were married to a scoundrel? Do you think there would have been any happiness in discovering that the father of your children was the—"

"For the love of Heaven, hush!" cried Miss Mortimer, her teeth chattering together violently. "Do you think I am not suffering enough already? What is this thing that you would show me? Let me see!"

She held out her hand with an energy that

seemed born of despair. She grasped the soiled paper, and trembling so that the lines were almost illegible, she read to the end; then she lifted her eyes to the face of that agonised mother. It was quivering with shame and anguish.

"Do you think that that has cost me nothing?" Mrs. Bruce asked, in an almost inaudible voice. "Do you think that it was an easy thing for me to allow even you to suspect the shame that has come upon me? But my duty was crying aloud. The man whom you would marry has not only deceived you but her! He has driven her to her death. Do you think there is any happiness to be found with such as he? Do you not understand that that hideous crime would stand between you forever and forever? Should you not see the agony of that betrayed girl every time that you glanced into his false face? Do you not know that it would poison every hour of your life until existence would become a curse?"

"But if I had not known."

The voice was so hoarse, so filled with anguish, that even Mrs. Bruce started, and a little cry escaped her.

"Would you have wished that?" she asked, with dull horror. "Do you think that Heaven would allow a crime like that to go unpunished, unavenged, always? Do you believe that it would have been possible for you to have gone all your life without knowing, and would you have wished it, even had it been possible? Oh, child, you do not know yourself! It is the horror that is upon you now, the hideous suffering in the death of your respect for the man whom you have loved. You would have discovered all some day, and then what would your agony have been like?"

And then Alice Mortimer remembered her suspicions that were confirmed now. All those awful things that she had feared were true. Should she be able to face the years with that bitter knowledge of her husband's frightful guilt before her always? I wonder if any of us have ever confronted a more hideous experience.

She stood for some time in stony silence, unable to speak under the excess of her most cruel emotion; then, with the letter still in her hand, she said, brokenly,—

"Will you leave me now? There is nothing more that you wish to tell me, is there?"

The question seemed to cut Mrs. Bruce to the heart.

"No," she answered, heavily. "Heaven knows I wish I could have spared you this!"

"Please don't say anything more about it. You thought you were doing your duty, and you were. Of course I shall see by-and-by that it was best; but you will understand how hard it is just now. I don't want to be cruel, but—"

Her lips seemed to have grown too stiff for her to complete her sentence. Mrs. Bruce did not approach a step nearer to her, but a great longing filled her eyes.

"You will learn to forgive me some day," she said, yearningly. "I have loved you next to my own child. When you have forgiven me, come to me or send for me. I shall know no contentment until you do so. Good-bye."

"Wait!"

The exclamation seemed to come mechanically, then Miss Mortimer paused to recollect what she had desired to say. Memory seemed to return, after an uncomfortable pause.

"I wanted to ask you," she said, slowly, "to remain at home until you hear from me. I don't know what I shall want to say to you, but I should like to know that you will be there when I come."

"I shall be there."

"Forgive me if I have hurt you."

"Ah! It is I who should ask forgiveness, for it is I who have brought the pain."

"Never mind. We shall both understand

it all better the next time we meet. I am very wrong, but I have not meant Good-bye."

She did not offer her hand. There were many things that Mrs. Bruce would have liked to have said, but her tongue seemed tied in face of the suffering that she but too readily read in that noble countenance.

"Heaven bless and comfort you!" she whispered, then turned and walked unsteadily from the room.

The fire upon the hearth was growing low. Mechanically Alice walked over to it, and, taking the brass poker from its rack, stirred the embers to a blaze. She sat down upon the rug where the warmth might reach her, but the very blood in her veins seemed stagnated.

Under the awful suffering that was paralyzing her she was trying to see her duty through inclination; but she was too honest a woman to deceive herself.

Sos loved Graham—had loved him all her life with the entire strength of a powerful nature—and she had never perhaps loved him before as she did at that moment. It is the pitiful contradiction of the human heart that it loves most that which it cannot possess, and her yearning was exquisite agony.

"What shall I do?" she whispered again and again, without finding an answer to her own query—"what shall I do?"

Then there was a long period of silence in which the torture seemed too great even to admit of thought. All the daylight had died away, and only the very faint glow of the fire fell upon her, making the scene weird and spectral. Her face was bowed upon her knee, and then, with it buried there, a wild cry went up from her heart.

"Oh, my darling," she moaned, "I cannot—not—cannot give you up!"

There was an oppressive silence after that, broken at last by a light footfall in the hall, and an instant afterward the portiere was lifted, and Graham Clinton stood there in the comparative darkness.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

CLINTON had called Miss Mortimer's name twice, and still she had not heard. Fearing he dared not think what, he stooped over and lifted her in his arms. She uttered a feeble cry and shrank away, but he placed her in a chair and knelt beside her. He would scarcely have recognised the drawn, haggard countenance that faced him.

He looked at her for some moments in stunned silence, then exclaimed,—

"Good heavens, Alice! what is it that has happened to you? Why have you deceived me? Why have you told me that there was nothing distressing you, and then allow me to return and find you like this? Speak to me, dear, and tell me this dreadful thing?"

Could she doubt the earnestness of that handsome face? She groaned aloud as the memory of all she had suffered and was to suffer still came to her. She covered her eyes with her trembling hands and did not reply.

"Alice," he cried, "you are driving me half mad! Is it that you do not trust me that you refuse to speak? At least answer something!"

"What is there to say?" she asked, her voice unrecognisably hoarse; "and how shall I say it? Graham, I have seen Mrs. Bruce!"

She spoke those last words in an awful whisper, and was startled at his wondering reply.

"Well?"

"Is not that enough?"

"Enough for what?"

"Is it possible that you don't know? Or are you trying to deceive me further?"

"I don't in the very least understand you. When did you see Mrs. Bruce?"

"Now—to day."

"And what did she tell you?"

"Everything."

But what is everything? You are speaking enigmas to me, Alice. I see you in this terrible state of excitement and grief, and the only explanation that you have to make to me is that Mrs. Bruce has been here and told you everything. I am as much in the dark as before. Can you tell me nothing further?"

She was sitting bolt upright in the chair in which he had placed her, gazing through the faint light into his face with a strained look that was painful.

"Let me look at you!" she cried, heavily. "Let me look straight into your eyes, Graham, and see if the man whom I have almost worshipped is capable of such deception as that! Let me—"

"Alice, what is it that you are saying?" he cried, haughtily. "In what have I ever deceived you? What is it that you mean?"

She lifted herself half off the chair and peered into his face weirdly.

"Ask yourself," she whispered. "Look back over all your life and see if there is not something in which you have deceived me. Think, Graham!"

He flushed to the very roots of his hair, and she was not slow to see it, even in that dim light.

"I told you of the one time in all my life in which I deceived you—or, rather, as much of it as you would allow me to tell," he stammered. "But Mrs. Bruce knows nothing of that. It is a subject that has never been mentioned between us."

Miss Mortimer had fallen back in her chair. She remembered then that she had in reality forbidden him to speak to her upon that subject. Was it so much his fault, then? What was she to think? How was she to act? She moistened her parched lips, and endeavoured to nerve herself to the hardest ordeal that she had ever been called upon to endure. Then, before she began, she rose and rang for lights.

Clinton had never seen her like that before, but the change awed him. He watched her in silence until she sat down before him again, and he knew that the subject was opened.

"Graham," she said, slowly, "I see now that I was wrong. I see that there should be no unexplained circumstances in the lives of those that expect to pass through years in the closest companionship that Heaven allows to mortals. But it is not too late, and I am ready to listen to you. Will you tell me all the truth?"

He was speechless for a moment, striving to decide in his own mind what had brought all this about; but, unable to discover any reason, he sat down and drew his chair opposite to hers. His countenance was contracted with pain.

"You mean the story of my—association with Decima Bruce?" he asked, heavily.

"Yes."

"I hoped that subject was buried between us for ever," he said, wearily; "but it must be as you will. The greatest sorrow of my life surrounds that time. I have not endeavoured to conceal that fact from you. Is it your wish that I should begin at the beginning and tell you a connected story?"

"Yes."

It seemed that she was unable to utter more than the monosyllable, and that in the shortest of gasps. Clinton looked at her closely, then with eyes still fixed upon her face he began, speaking slowly, and straining after a calmness that cut her to the soul. For the first time she seemed really to realize what Decima had been to him. He apparently forgot the presence of his promised wife as he proceeded with the story, but rambled on as if he were living in that past that had been so unspeakably sweet to him. He went on to the day when he had heard of her last, and as he concluded his head dropped upon his hands and an awful groan escaped him. He was suffering again as he had suffered in those days that were gone, and she knew it. She watched

him in silence for some time, the sobs in her throat almost strangling her. Of all the grief that her life had ever known that moment held the greatest. But it mastered her.

She rose at last and placed her hand upon his shoulder.

"Graham," she said, gently, "have you told me—everything? Is there nothing more to add?"

He lifted his face, distorted with agony.

"I have told you all that I can," he answered, hoarsely.

"Why can you tell me nothing further?"

"I cannot answer."

"Then let me answer for you. Read that!"

She placed the letter in his hands and walked to the other end of the room while he read. She was trying to think what she ought to do, trying to subdue the ghastly pain at her heart; but it was a useless endeavour. She returned and stood beside him, with her hand upon the back of his chair.

He lifted his ashen face.

"Well?" he said, hoarsely.

"Is that true?"

"Yes."

There was a long silence. She did not know how foolishly she had hoped until then. A low cry, quickly suppressed, like that which follows a stab of pain, fell from her lips. Then the calmness of death came over her.

"Why did not you tell me?"

"Do you think that I ever should?" he inquired, hoarsely.

"But you meant to make her your wife?"

"Before Heaven—yes!"

"Did you—did you ever suspect the reason why—she went away?"

"It was because she knew that I would never give her up, and because she was determined that she would not come between you and me."

A spasm contracted Miss Mortimer's face. How much more noble, more self-sacrificing that child had been than she! She wanted to do everything then to make up for even the wrong of a momentary intention. She bent forward eagerly.

"But could you see no other reason?"

"No."

"Think, think, Graham!"

He started up with a low cry of horror.

"You don't mean—"

"Yes, I do—yes!"

"Good Heaven!"

She never forgot the expression of his countenance then. There was almost insanity in it. She went up and soothingly placed her hand upon his shoulder.

"You must not excite yourself so!" she cried. "You must——"

But apparently he had not heard her.

"What a scoundrel I have been!" he gasped. "God in Heaven! what punishment do I not deserve for the sorrow and shame that I have brought into that poor child's life! I am more her murderer than if I had struck the blow that placed her in her coffin! Oh, Decima! Decima!"

She had never heard such grief expressed in the mere calling of a name. He concealed his face and sobbed horribly.

"Graham!" she cried, heavily, "don't do that! It is not quite so bad as you think. I cannot tell you yet—but—Come away with me now, to-night. There is something that must be done at once. I cannot tell you yet, but——"

Her manner startled him even out of his terrible paroxysm of grief. He turned and caught her by the shoulders.

"What is it that you mean?" he cried. "For Heaven's sake, speak quickly! I am almost mad!"

She hesitated. She did not know how much she ought to tell him just then.

"Come with me to Leeds to-night," she said, pleadingly.

"For what?"

"Don't ask me. I cannot tell you now, but you shall know to-morrow."

"I must know now—now!"

"Then—Be quiet, Graham. You are trembling so, dear."

"But——"

"I think—mind you, Graham, I don't say anything except that I think—but it may be that I have seen—your child!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

It was with a heavy heart that Philip Browne left Decima alone in that room with her dead baby.

"Poor child!" he muttered. "There is little enough that any of us can do for her now. She may have erred, but there was never a woman who has been more cruelly punished. I never saw a purer or more innocent face. I am quite convinced that there has been some horrible mistake, I don't believe that she is guilty of the wrong that is ascribed to her. And how she suffers! She needs the tender sympathy of a woman. It is only a woman who would know how to speak the words that she needs to hear. But who is to speak them? If Miss Mortimer were only—Why not send for her? She is only a little way off. I shall go for her myself. It can do no harm. She is so gentle, so tender, so womanly. I wonder that I did not think of it long ago. I shall go at once, early as it is."

To think with Dr. Browne was to act. He took his hat and crushed it down over his eyes, then walked hastily down the street. He paused before the handsome residence and mounting the stoop, pulled the bell.

The servants were just beginning to move silently through the great house. One answered the summons.

"I want to see Miss Mortimer," exclaimed Dr. Browne, who was known to the girl. "Don't disturb any one else in the house, but tell her—Wait—I will write a line upon my card."

He selected a card, then scribbled upon it,—

"Will you come with me to see our little friend? She is in great distress and needs you. Will explain when I see you, but don't lose any time."

The girl took it.

Miss Mortimer had left London the night before with Graham Clinton, but not considering it either advisable or prudent to go to the hotel, had gone to the home of her friends. She sprang out of bed when she had read the note that the servant had aroused her to deliver, and dressed herself hurriedly for the street. She did not pause to greet Dr. Browne when she joined him, but asked,—

"What is the matter? What has happened?"

"The child is dead!"

"Dead!" she gasped. "When?"

"A few minutes ago, of spasms. That poor child—I scarcely know what to think of her. I have never seen anyone in such a state. She needs some woman friend, and I thought of you."

Miss Mortimer did not reply. She had quite recovered herself, and hurried almost into a run down the street. Her thoughts were busy, but not a word did she speak upon that quick walk.

"Is she in here?" she asked, as she paused before the door that she knew led to Decima's room.

"Yes."

She did not knock for admission, but opened it softly and entered.

A hoarse cry escaped her as the tableau met her eye.

The baby lay upon the bed, and by its side stood the frantic mother, with a half smile upon her lips and that fatal bottle clasped in her hands. She had not heard the opening of the door, and lifted it to her lips as Alice Mortimer entered.

With a single bound Alice had reached her. She caught the hand that would have taken

life, and the bottle fell to the floor, smashing at Decima's feet.

She looked from the spilled liquid to her visitor's face almost vacantly.

"You could not do that," she said, miserably. "Oh, Miss Mortimer! if you have any pity, don't torture me!"

"Do you know me so little that you think I could? I am going to prove to you that—Graham Clinton is—noting to me!"

What it cost her to utter those words no one ever knew, but they were spoken quietly, almost cheerfully.

"How?" whispered Decima.

"By showing you the gentleman whose wife I have promised to be."

There was a certain rigidity about the white lips that gave evidence of the woman's agony; but even that passed away as she opened the door and signalled Dr. Browne, who still stood without, to enter.

He came at her silent call, and going forward, placed his hand upon Decima's head. She gazed from one to the other in bewilderment.

"This is the gentleman of whom I was speaking," said Alice, with an imploring glance in his direction. "Dr. Browne, will you not assure Decima that I am your betrothed wife?"

The look of astonishment upon Browne's countenance gave place to one of deep pain. The eyes of both women were upon him, the one in mute terribly agitated inquiry, the other in pleading that he could not comprehend. What was he to say? His lips grew white as death as he replied,—

"If it is your desire that I should do so then I am ready."

Miss Mortimer swayed for a moment, but recovered herself before Dr. Browne had reached her side. She smiled at him, but it was piteously weak. Then they both turned to Decima, who had slipped from her chair and lay there upon the bare floor with a strangely white face.

"She has fainted!" exclaimed the doctor, as he lifted her in his arms and placed her upon the bed beside the dead infant.

"We must remove it before she recovers consciousness," said Miss Mortimer, gently.

"Poor, suffering, noble child! how we have all wronged her! There is a message that must be sent at once. Will you see that it is delivered?"

"Yes."

"May I have a leaf from your notebook?"

He gave her a prescription blank and a pencil, and she scribbled—

"DEAR GRAHAM.—Come at once with messenger. Be prepared for a terrible shock. A great sorrow and a greater joy awaits you. Don't delay." "ALICE."

With trembling hands she confided it to Dr. Browne, after holding it up for his inspection. He could not comprehend the situation, but he knew that it would be explained to him in time, and leaving her there to await him he went from the room with the message.

"See what you have done!" she said, dully. "It is all gone now, and my little princess cannot wait much longer."

"What would you do?" gasped Miss Mortimer. "Do you not know?"

She could not finish her sentence for the horror that was upon her. Decima moaned.

"What shall I do?" she asked, helplessly.

"What shall I do? Oh, why did you come?"

Miss Mortimer took the little figure in her arms and held her closely as if she were a tiny, grieving child. All the nobility of her great nature was restored. She felt that she could never do enough to show her appreciation for the great sacrifices that girl had made for her. Her life would have seemed a small recompence at that moment.

"My darling!" she whispered. "what was it that you intended to do? Don't you know that she was wicked? Don't you know that

God would have punished you through all eternity for taking that which is His? Don't you know that you would never have seen the face of your little one in the life that is to come? Is it not better to wait for a time, in order that you may be rejoined in that new life in which there is no death and no separation?"

Decima drew back and gazed at her in silence for a time, then burst into tears. Alice let her weep "without reproof until her tears had ceased to flow."

"It is so hard!" she moaned—"so hard! What is there in life to live for? How can I face all the dreadful years of torture alone?"

"But you will not face it alone, my darling," said Alice, tenderly. "There is one who loves you—who is waiting even now to ask your forgiveness for the great wrong that he has done you. Do you think there will be no happiness for you, Decima, in being Graham Clinton's wife?"

The haggard eyes were lifted. There was a moment of painful silence, then Decima whispered—

"What is it that you mean?"

"That you are to be happy, my dearest, in spite of all your suffering. Graham does not know yet that you live; but he is here in this town waiting for me to bring him to you—waiting to see his child."

Decima shuddered.

"But you will not tell him! Remember that I hold your promise to tell no one—no one at all!"

"Would you keep a father from the sight of his dead child?"

Decima drew back.

"What do you mean?" she whispered, hoarsely.

"That I know all—all the generous, noble sacrifices that you have made for me, and all the suffering that I have caused you, my darling! Oh, Decima, could you not have understood that nothing under heaven could have induced me to come between you and the man who loved you? You will be Graham's wife now, and—"

"No, no, no! You don't understand! I never could do that—never!"

"Why not?"

"Can't you see? You have been the best, the only friend I have ever known. Do you think that I would rob you of the man whom you love? Do you think I would take from you the man who for years has been your promised husband?"

"Not when you know that I never shall be his wife!"

"Not even then, because you love him!"

There was a resolution in the sad voice that Miss Mortimer knew could not be shaken; but now that the two women had entered upon a contest of self-sacrifice she determined that nothing could stand between her and the end that she had in view. She felt that to see Graham Clinton and Decima happy would in some measure expiate the sin that she had committed in thought if not in reality—the sin of separating those two who loved each other, and all her nature was aroused in the endeavour.

There was an anguish in the white face that Decima was too heart-broken to see, but the voice was almost steady as she said, softly,—

"But suppose that I should tell you that I do not love him?"

"I would not believe you," she said, quivering.

"But suppose I could prove it to you?"

CHAPTER XXXV.

EARLY as it was when the messenger sent to Clinton's hotel arrived he was already dressed, and was endeavouring to swallow a few morsels that had been set before him for breakfast.

The mysterious conduct of Alice Mortimer the night before had prevented his sleeping,

She had explained nothing; but he would have been more than obtuse not to have seen that there was something much beyond the ordinary in her concealed meaning. He scarcely dared attempt to guess what it all meant, and yet his heart told him that some great change had come into his life. Every sort of theory that the fanciful brain of man could invent he had considered as the explanation of her conduct, but each was as promptly rejected as conceived.

"I am allowing myself to hope for too much," he told himself again and again, striving to curb his own eagerness. "The reaction will be so great that it cannot be endured when I find how I have really permitted my imagination to run riot over reason. Women are all sensational. Poor Alice! How she has suffered through me! Ah, Heaven! What happiness do I deserve? What grief have I not brought upon the two women that I would have given my life to protect from harm? How noble and generous they both have been, and how little I have deserved the love of either."

He leaned his head upon his hand and groaned as he looked down into his plate. He felt that he could not bear the uncertainty much longer, that he must demand some explanation from her, let the hour be what it might. He was rising from the breakfast-table with that determination well defined, when the messenger addressed him.

"You are Mr. Graham Clinton?"

"I am."

"There is a letter, and I am to take you with me as an answer."

There was no envelope upon it, and very hastily Clinton cast his eye over the contents. A vivid flush arose to his brow, followed suddenly by a pallor that was alarming. What could it be that she meant? he asked himself. He did not pause to answer his own query, but hurried after the messenger.

"Is it far?" he asked.

"About half a mile."

There was a cab standing at the door of the hotel. Clinton sprung in.

"Give the order to the driver," he cried to the boy, "and tell him to drive fast for double money!"

The boy obeyed, then sprung in and closed the door.

Under the tempting promise the driver was not many minutes in reaching the address that had been given, and wondering greatly at the poverty of the surroundings to which Miss Mortimer had summoned him, he leaped to the ground, and, ordering the driver to wait, ran up the few steps.

The door was opened by Alice herself.

Her face was very pale, but there was a smile in her eyes for all that which reassured him. He caught her hand and pressed it with a force of which he was unaware.

"For Heaven's sake don't keep me in suspense!" he exclaimed, huskily. "Tell me what is it you mean, and what has happened?"

"But you must be calm, first," she cried, her own voice trembling between a hysterical laugh and cry. "Everything depends upon your calmness."

"Don't, don't! The suspense is maddening!"

"But it is for her sake, Graham!"

"Hers? Whose?"

"Decima's!"

He staggered against the door. For a moment the frightful pallor of his face alarmed her, but the next a wild joy had illuminated his eyes such as she had never seen expressed by any countenance.

"Decima!" he whispered. "You could not be cruel enough to deceive me like that! Explain to me quickly, for the love of Heaven!"

A faintness, a giddiness oppressed Miss Mortimer's heart, but it was but momentary; then all the old generous self-sacrifice returned. She put up her hand and touched his cheek caressingly.

"She is not dead, as we all thought," she said, gently. "There was—a secret that she concealed even from you! It is a very sad time for Decima, dear, in spite of the fact that she knows of the happiness that is in store for her, because—you must be very brave for her sake, Graham, for she has suffered even more than you think. Her—child is—dead!"

He did not speak. His pallid lips seemed incapable of articulation. He stood there staring at her helplessly for a long time, then in a dull, stupid sort of way he said, almost quietly,—

"Take me to her."

She turned away and opened the door. Then she closed it again behind him, and he was alone with the woman who had been the one love of his life.

She was lying upon the bed with her head propped up with pillows, her great brown, haggard eyes fixed upon the door. That same bleak despair that had characterised her expression was still there; but as she recognised the figure that had come through the door she tried to raise herself. The effort was too great. She flung out her arms, the low gasping cry reaching only him, and the next moment she was in his arms, pressed closely to his madly beating heart.

There were no words between them. They were both weeping, their tears mingling as their lips met and clung together. Then when their agitation had been somewhat controlled Clinton whispered, brokenly,—

"My love, my wife, how we have both suffered!"

"Heaven never yet let a sin go unpunished, Graham," she faltered. "We have no right to complain. Have they told you—"

She could not finish the sentence; but he knew from the grief in the sweet eyes that she referred to the death of her baby. He drew her closer to him and held her lips to his cheek.

"Not all, darling, but enough to make me understand what a curse I have been to your pure life. Can you ever forgive me, Decima?"

"I told you long ago that there must be no talk of that between us. Heaven has forgiven, and has sent the sweet signal of pardon in you. Oh, my love, my love! I could not have borne life longer without you. The burden had grown too great. I have been a terrible coward. I could not even hope when they told me that you were coming. I can scarcely believe that you are here now, though I feel the throb of your heart against my own."

"But it is all true, my little Princess."

She started. The old sweet name had brought back the memory of her great loss to her. She tried to rise, but he was forced to lift her.

"What is it, sweetheart?" he whispered.

"We must go to—her! Oh, Graham, if you could only have seen her once in life I might have been content."

"Hush, love! We must not question the will of Heaven. Are you strong enough to bear it?"

"Yes!"

He lifted her from the bed and supported her with his strong arm. She was very frail, very weak, and his heart ached as he saw the terrible changes in her that suffering had wrought; but she was even more beautiful to him than ever, and it seemed to him that much as he had loved her in the old time he had not known the meaning of love till now.

She indicated the way, and he half-carried her to the room in which she knew they had placed the little form that they were so soon to lose for ever.

They had placed it upon a little cot, and together the father and mother knelt beside the body of their child.

When the first grief had subsided Clinton rose and took the little dead thing in his arms, holding his baby for the first time to his breast. Very tenderly he brushed the soft golden hair back from the delicate brow and

pressed his lips upon the tiny mouth, murmuring unheard words of love.

Decima sat there upon the floor with her great grief-stricken eyes fixed upon them, thinking what a radiant joy it would have been had that tender heart but known that it was her father who held her, that it was her father who whispered those precious words. A quivering sob escaped her, and laying the tiny thing gently back upon the couch Clinton lifted Decima and took her to the room that they had left.

"It is very bitter, darling," he whispered, "but Heaven knows best. The world would have been very cruel to her, dear heart, because of the sin of her father. You must remember that, and understand that it is best for her sake."

But in the first wild grief a mother never can see the justice in the sacrifice.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THERE was a long consultation half an hour later between Graham Clinton and Alice Mortimer. Decima was present, but she took no part in it, lying quietly upon the bed with her hand clasped tenderly in his. If there was a pang of jealousy in Miss Mortimer's heart it was carefully concealed, and her countenance was as clear as an unclouded sky as she talked.

If Clinton wondered at this he was too wise a man to speak. Naturally he had not forgotten her grief of the night before; but it seemed to him then that it was more mourning for the shattering of an ideal than suffering over the blow dealt her love. The thought comforted him, and he preserved it.

"You wish my advice as to what is best to do?" she asked with a smile.

"Yes," he answered, gratefully. "We owe so much to you that—"

"Hush! You owe me nothing. I have cost you a year of suffering the most intense, and it seems to me now that I can never do enough to erase it. But we will let that go. I thank Heaven that I was the innocent rather than the guilty cause. Now here is my plan. If you don't like it, don't hesitate to say so."

"It is sure to be the best and most generous."

"Wait until you have heard before you judge. There is no reason why any one should know the truth of this."

"I understand," said Clinton, an expression of shame coming to his countenance.

She hurried on.

"And—and I think it is your desire as well as mine that it should be upon the arm of her husband that Decima leans when she stands for the last time beside that child whom she so loved."

Clinton looked his gratitude.

"You know," continued Miss Mortimer, "that the baby cannot be buried from here. We will take it to London and have the ceremony from my house. You can be quietly married at once. There need be no one present except myself and some member of the minister's household who never saw you and will never hear of you again. In that way I am quite sure that we can keep the matter confined to those who already know, and they are sufficiently interested in Decima to wish to be silent for her sake. In fact, I see no reason why even they should know the real truth. If you will let me tell the story to Philip Browne and Fred James there is no reason why I could not arrange it satisfactorily with little trouble. Do you agree?"

"Nothing could be better. I don't see how we are to thank you for all the kindness that you are showing us, Alice. I have deserved it very little."

"We were not to mention that subject again, I thought."

"But how can one be silent?"

"Do you think that I should not be interested after all these years of brotherly and sisterly affection?" she asked, half averting her face.

"It sounds so strange to hear you say that," exclaimed Decima, softly. "It does not seem possible that all this hideous suffering has been a mistake—that it was useless from the beginning. Just to think, Graham! I thought she loved you, and it was dear, generous, great-hearted Dr. Browne all the time! She is his betrothed wife, and, oh, I do pray Heaven that you may be happy as you deserved, Miss Mortimer!"

She observed the strange flush that had arisen to her friend's face, but did not construe it aright. Clinton had straightened up.

"Betrothed to Browne, you say?" he almost gasped.

There was a slight pause of embarrassment, then Miss Mortimer answered quietly,—

"Yes. It has been a very great mistake, all around. I am engaged to Philip."

It was not an easy announcement for her to make. Her very soul seemed to contract under the pain of it, but she was repaid for her sacrifice when she saw the expression of gladness upon Clinton's face.

He sprang up, and, catching her about the waist, kissed her upon the lips.

"Thank Heaven!" he cried, brokenly. "There is nothing that could have given me greater happiness than this. You have been the good angel of my life."

"No, the Nemesis, Clinton. But for me you might have been happy months ago. Let me go now, dear. Remember that I have all the arrangements to make, and there is no time to be lost if we are to leave for London to-night."

She left them after that, and they watched her go as they might have watched an angel. Clinton suspected more than he dared to acknowledge even to himself, but there could be nothing done, and repining now was useless. He was alone with the single love of his entire life, and in spite of the terrible grief that was upon them in the first hours of their reunion he was happy.

It was in the afternoon of the same day that Dr. Browne entered the room where Miss Mortimer stood with the undertaker. The latter was upon the point of leaving, and took his departure soon after. Then she turned to Browne.

"You should have gone to your room to rest after leaving the hospital, instead of coming here," she said, gently. "You are sadly in need of it."

"Do you think I could rest until I had seen you?" he said, with an unsuccessful effort to conceal his agitation. "I think this day has been filled with the greatest unrest that I have ever known. There has seemed a week in each hour."

Miss Mortimer's face was slowly alterating from white to crimson. Her hands were trembling, and her lips almost refused to do her bidding as she tried to speak calmly, avoiding the subject to which she knew he referred.

"It has been a long day, hasn't it?" she asked. "But then there has been so much to do—so much to bear. What would you think if I should tell you that there was a secret marriage long ago between Graham Clinton and Decima?"

"I should call him no less a contemptible scoundrel than I think him now!" answered Browne, with energy.

"You must not say that—indeed you must not, for there is no man who deserves it less than Graham. The circumstances that have surrounded him have been most unfortunate, that is all. I cannot explain them to you, but when I tell you that I am more than satisfied you will understand that you have misjudged him, will you not?"

But in spite of her pleading he was not quite convinced.

"Yet he was engaged to you when he had a wife!" he said, heavily.

"He thought her dead. The person whom we all believed to be Decima lies in the cemetery, where Clinton and I stood side by side to see her buried. He never concealed his love for her from me. There was no deception. I knew that he never loved me. He has suffered as men rarely do. Don't become a Pharisee! Judge nothing that you do not understand. I am not at liberty to tell you secrets that are not my own; but you will try to believe, will you not?"

"I am willing to accept whatever you say is right, because I am utterly in the dark. They have their own reasons, I suppose, for wishing to conceal these things, and I have neither the desire nor the right to pry into them. But there is one part of it which concerns me very closely, and it is upon that point that I have come to you to-day. Alice, what was it that you meant by making the announcement to—shall I say Mrs. Clinton that you did?"

He paused and looked down upon her, but her eyes were upon the floor, and she did not reply. Her breathing was not quite regular. He understood her embarrassment clearly enough, and took her hand soothingly, tenderly, not quite concealing his own emotions, but succeeded in remaining very quiet.

"I asked you only a little while ago to be my wife, and you declined," he said, slowly. "Have you reconsidered your answer? Are you willing to trust me with your future, Alice?"

She bravely lifted her eyes to his face.

"The situation is a most distressing one, Philip," she answered, hesitatingly. "I am afraid that I have taken a most contemptible advantage of you, and you have the right to withdraw from it if you so desire. The announcement that I made was an impulse in which you were not considered. I see how wrong it was. I wish you would not take that into consideration at all. I wish that you would forget that I have said that."

"I don't think I quite comprehend you. Is it that you wish to withdraw from the unconsidered engagement?"

She did not reply; but again her eyes were cast upon the floor.

A sudden flush dyed Browne's face.

"Very well!" he cried, passionately. "So be it. Let us forget all the past. Alice, will you be my wife? You know that I love you—You know that I always shall. What is your answer?"

There were tears in her eyes as she lifted them gratefully.

"You are so good, so generous!" she cried, brokenly. "Let me be thoroughly honest, if I can. It is too new yet, to talk about forgetting the past. I have told you before, and I told the truth. I have no right to tell you that it was all a mistake, for that would be a cruel falsehood. But are you willing to trust me? Are you willing to wait?"

"As Jacob did for Rachel."

"Then I will be your wife."

There was no great demonstration upon either side. He kissed her forehead quietly and pressed her hand. The undertaker came to her for some instructions, and she left her betrothed husband to give them.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THERE was a quiet wedding as soon as possible, in London, at which only the contracting parties, the clergyman, Miss Mortimer, and a person who signed his name Alfred Judd were present. The last named rather objected, after the old-fashioned idea, to seeing a woman married in black; but Miss Mortimer felt sure that that would never affect the happiness of Graham Clinton's young wife, and so expressed herself.

They were driven immediately after the

ceremony to Miss Mortimer's residence, when Clinton himself insisted upon going after Mrs. Bruce. Alice offered to go, but Clinton would not listen to that, and, taking the same carriage that had brought them, he drove to the old tenement that was to be Mrs. Bruce's home no longer.

What occurred there no one ever knew, but Clinton told Decima afterwards that he had spoken only the truth to her mother. Certain it was that she went back with him to the residence of Miss Mortimer. No one saw her meeting with her daughter, and no one asked what took place, but it was upon the arm of her son-in-law that she leaned when she looked for the first and last time upon the face of her granddaughter.

It was a most pathetic picture, but one in which all saw great happiness in the perspective, in spite of the shadow upon it then.

The funeral occurred, with strict privacy, next day, the little form being placed by that other one over whom they had wept such bitter tears.

The story of the private marriage, the subsequent misunderstanding, and the supposed death were told to Mrs. James and Fred, also to all those who had known Decima during that wretched time, and if there were any doubt upon the subject those most interested never knew.

Mrs. Bruce was established shortly after that in a house that was the property of Graham Clinton, and, after being sure of her perfect comfort, he and his wife started away for a tour about the world that was to last for several months. It was rather difficult for Mrs. Bruce to lose her daughter so soon after her recovery; but then she knew that it was wisest and best, and said nothing but words of encouragement when the plan was proposed by Clinton.

During the hours of leisure and comfort of mind and body that followed Mrs. Bruce made the translation of the novel that Clinton had brought her upon that night that she had known the greatest sorrow of her life. It proved to be the forerunner of what was afterward a wonderful success in the line of translations. An original novel was added later on in life, and from it to day her name stands enrolled most brilliantly prominent in the archives of literature.

It was not long after the departure of Mr. and Mrs. Clinton that the father of Miss Mortimer died. There had been an unusual attachment between the two, and life was exceedingly lonely to her. It was during one of his visits to London than Philip Browne observed the emptiness of her life, and, while he had resolved never to urge her to become his wife, but to allow her to take her own time, he could bear it no longer, and broke the pledge he had made himself.

He urged upon her only the companionship of which she was standing so much in need, and she accepted it. He went back to Leeds, resigned his position there, and, with very little preparation, there was another wedding. Clinton and Decima were still absent, which was as Miss Mortimer would have desired.

Then they, too, went abroad, remaining for more than a year. The companionship was close enough, but a wedding like that is a most dangerous thing, a fact which Alice realised painfully after marriage. She hesitated to go to her husband, who was nothing more than her brother, after all, with any of the affairs that concerned her, lest he misunderstand or misconstrue her. It was the silence which he misunderstood, and a coldness, a formality sprung up between them that effectively froze the sweet intimacy of the marriage tie.

They neither had the courage to propose a return home, and a time of great misery as either had ever known had come upon them. Browne was all that she could have desired, in so far as his attentions were concerned, but

they were the attentions of the courteous stranger, and not the lover.

Woman-like, the great change, which was constantly growing, cast her to the heart, and she began to yearn for the little demonstrations that he had shown her at first. From the small acknowledgment to her own heart, to the ultimate realisation that she was passionately in love with him, was the work of months, and months of thorough unhappiness to them both.

They were in a far distant land upon the anniversary of their marriage, but the memories that the day brought were not mentioned between them when the evening came. They were seated in the same room, Browne pretending to read, and his wife gazing from a window at something which she could not see, when the silence and the yearning grew too great to be borne. She rose suddenly with an energy that was borne of despair, intending to end all then and there, but the sight of his emotionless face stopped her.

The sudden movement, the start, the stop attracted him. He glanced up. The quivering countenance in that usually impassive face startled him. He laid his paper aside and arose.

"What is it, Alice?" he asked, quietly. "Are you not well?"

The sound of the voice loosened all the flood-gates of her misery.

"No," she cried, "I am not well! I want to go home. Why do you not take me? It is all too utterly wretched to be borne longer. I tell you that I shall die under it! Take me home and I promise you that you shall never be distressed again with the sight of a face that has grown hateful to you!"

"Alice!"

"Let me finish while I can. I know that I did wrong to almost force you into that engagement with me, and I have received nothing that I have not deserved; but surely it is enough. I can't tell you how I have suffered—how I am suffering! Oh, Philip, take me home! I will keep my word to you, let the cost be what it may!"

He was upon his feet. There was grief and shame blended in his expression. He took her hand and very gently forced her into a seat. Once or twice he walked up and down the floor to regain his composure, listening to the sound of her convulsive weeping; then he returned and stood with his hand upon the back of her chair, looking sadly down upon her.

"Alice," he said, softly, calling her by the old name for the first time in months. "I cannot tell you what this has cost me. I have seen for some time how utterly miserable you have been, and I have wanted to suggest that we return home, but I did not know how to frame the suggestion in a way that you would not misunderstand. Heaven knows if I had ever guessed that our marriage was to end in this way I would have sacrificed my life before forcing it upon you as I did. I deluded myself into the belief that I could win your love, when I see now that I was taking the shortest way to make you despise me. I wish I could make you understand my position. I wish I could make you see how bitterly I regret the past; but that is impossible. It is but natural that you should have only the hardest, most cruel thoughts of me, and when I try to say anything to convince you that I am not the creature you have imagined me my tongue seems tied, and I can say nothing."

Her tears had ceased, and she was staring up at him with an astonishment which he could not translate.

She turned in her chair and put her hand upon his. His fingers closed spasmodically over her own.

"What are you saying, Philip?" she asked, in a queer tone. "Do you mean that you are so blind that you think still that I do not love you?"

A boyish flush leaped to his brow.

"Don't torture me!" he said, little above a

whisper. "You know that the one passion of my life has been given to you, and—"

"That it died!"

He almost held her breath for his reply to her half assertion, half interrogation.

"Died!" he ejaculated, hoarsely. "When? I don't want to trouble you with my feelings, but yet neither would I have you believe that which is so untrue. I don't ask for anything in return now, because I see that it is so cruelly impossible, but I have never loved you as I do at this moment."

She was upon her feet before him, and a single exclamation had fallen from her lips. It was—

"Oh, Philip!"

But there was such a world of expression in it that he peered into her face with a curious start; then, when he had seen, he caught her hand in a grasp that was painful.

"Speak to me quickly!" he gasped. "What is it that you mean? This is exquisite torture, so don't keep me in suspense!"

"We have been so blind," she said. "Do you think that Heaven always darkens a life that it shadows? Oh, Philip, I have believed that you had grown to despise me, and it almost broke my heart, because I love you!"

"My wife!"

There is little left to tell.

During their voyage home there was another heir born to the Clinton estate—another girl, called this time "Alice Mortimer Clinton," and a right welcome addition she is to the household, the spoiled idol of her fond grandmamma. It is a joyous reunion, in which there is no shadow of regret upon the part of any one, and Philip Browne is not the last to realise that happy fact.

Fred James is the only wanderer,

He never married, but devoted his life to his mother, and now that the years have softened the sting of bitterness connected with his love, he visits the Clintons and his former brother-in-law frequently, doing his share to spoil the ever-petted Miss Clinton in the most approved fashion.

If there's a shadow even so large as a man's hand in the sunlit horizon, the most experienced skipper has not yet discovered it.

[THE END.]

THE STEWARD OF THE UMBRIA carries for every trip of seven days the following among other perishables: 90 sheep, 1,000 lb. lamb, 1,200 lb. beef, 2,500 lb. ham, 1,000 lb. bacon, 500 fowls, one ton of fish, 12 tons of potatoes, 12 tons of ice, 1,200 eggs, and 2,000 pounds of butter. For the out and home trip are carried, among other things, 20,000 oranges and 20,000 lemons; 1,100 lb. of cheese, 1,200 lb. of coffee, 500 lb. tea, 5,800 lb. of sugar, 1,400 quarts of condensed milk, 100 8lb. jars of jam. The liquor list is of vast dimensions, and is wound up by 20,000 gallons of water. The saloon outfit of a popular Cunard steamer on the New York station consists of 50,000 pieces of linen, glass, earthenware, cutlery, and plate.

AUTOMATIC DELIVERY OF LETTERS.—An invention which is exciting a good deal of interest on the Continent, where the flat system of residence is so much in vogue, is an automatic electric letter and parcel deliverer, produced by a resident of Geneva. As its name implies, the apparatus is designed to distribute automatically on each door, and to all the tenants of a house the letters or parcels which may be addressed to them. A large box situated on the ground floor contains as many apertures as there are floors or tenants in the house. When a letter or other object is introduced into one of these openings the box rises and, in passing, distributes in each of the receptacles fixed in the antechamber of the addresses the articles intended for them, each tenant being in turn advised of the arrival of the article by the ring of an electric bell.

FACETIA.

Let him scoff at influenza who never felt its grip.

There is always a hand of welcome ready to be offered to the strange umbrella.

TOMSON : " My wife and I never disagree." JOHNSON : " Her word is law, then."

It is strange, but true, that when a man is short of brains he is generally long on collar.

We judge our neighbours by ourselves, when they are good; when bad by other neighbours.

A BRIDEGBROOM is like a car-coupler. He is the most insignificant object in sight; but the thing can't go on without him.

The sweetness of the uses of adversity is one of the things best understood by contemplation from a distance.

" MAMMA," asked a little boy, who had been to dry a towel before the fire, " is it done when it is known?"

TOUTUMS (aged three), seeing the cook plucking a goose : " Nurse, is Mary undressing the goose to give him his bath?"

No one can ever tell what a woman will do next. If any one did tell, she would be sure to go and do something else.

The man who wrote " one half the world doesn't know how the other half lives," never could have lived in a small country town.

The man who knows everything is generous with his knowledge. He always wants to tell it.

" I DON'T understand what you see in a game of football," she said. " You see stars," replied the new player, emphatically.

" Did any of you ever see an elephant's skin?" inquired a teacher of an infant class. " Yes, sir." " Where?" " On an elephant."

WHAT IS THE difference between a devoted swain and a doting father? One is a sighing lover, and the other is a loving sire.

MISS TRILL : " I love to hear the birds sing." JACK DOWNTOWN (warmly) : " So do I. They never attempt a piece beyond their ability."

A NEWLY MARRIED man has discovered that the difference between an umbrella and a woman is that you can sometimes shut up the umbrella.

A BLIND carpenter took his hammer and saw. A clumsy wheelwright picked up a hub and spoke. To which may be added that a deaf farmer drove in his flock and herd.

A PERSON fond of the marvellous told an improbable story, adding, as was his won's, " Did you ever hear of that before?" " No, sir," said the other; " pray, did you?"

ADAM was the only man who ever started for his office of motoring without having some of his woman folks stop him at the front door to brush his coat.

IN THE restaurant, " Garcon, I've waited here one mortal hour!" said Chappie. " That's so, sir. But just think o' me. I've been waiting here for ten years!"

Did you ever notice how sometimes the earth seems to smile at the sun?" said the poetic young woman. " Oh, yes," he answered. " The sun's an old flame of hers, you know."

WHEN the teacher asked, " What made the Tower of Pisa lean?" the slengy boy at the foot of the class promptly responded, " Because it was built that way."

WHEN you read in the paper that a certain—or uncertain—report is " important if true," you are pretty safe in making up your mind that it isn't true.

GAYMAN : " This is a great day with us at home. My daughter 'comes out' to-night." Damley : " Don't say! So does my brother. He's been in for seven years."

" HELLO, old man, have any luck shooting?" " I should say I did. Shot seventeen ducks in one day." " Were they wild?" " Well—no—not exactly; but the farmer that owned them was."

BILKINS : " How do do? Had the grip yes?" WITKINS : " No." BILKINS : " I'm sorry for you, old fellow. What on earth do you talk about when you meet people?"

" WHAT I six hundred dollars for that antique? Why, that's just twice as much as you asked for it a month ago. But, madam, it's just twice as old as it was then."

MISTRESS : " Bridget, didn't you hear me call?" BRIDGET : " Yes, mum; but ye towld me the other day never to answer ye back, an' I didn't."

" Do you think there is anything in the theory that married men live longer than unmarried ones?" asked the gay bachelor. " Oh, I don't know!" said the henpecked friend, warily—" seems longer."

MURRAY HILL : " Shakespeare died on the same day of the month on which he was born." MRS. MURRAY HILL : " Not possible. How was he able to write so many dramas if he only lived such a short time?"

LITTLE girl (reading) : " Nature unadorned is adorned the most. What does that mean?" LITTLE BROTHER (after deep thought) : " I guess it means a roast chicken is nicer than a chicken with its feathers on."

HIS HEART UNCHANGED. " Marriage has not changed him much," said Mrs. FOOTS. " Before we were married he would not let me carry the lightest bundle—and he does not now. He lets me lug the heavy ones."

YOUNG WIFE : " Don't you consider marriage a means of race, George?" YOUNG HUSBAND (who has already been forced to play second fiddle in the household) : " Yes; anything is a means of grace that leads to repentance."

JIMSON : " I heard that that fly-away, Mindie Jinks, is going to be married. Wonder who the unfortunate individual is?" HOBBS : " He happens to be standing in my shoes at the present moment."

STEWARD ! " cried the miserable passenger. " Yes, sir. Anything I can bring you, sir?" " Nothing, steward, but an acre of real estate—anything—hang the neighbourhood, so long as it's good solid ground."

" THERE was a man in front of my house yesterday with an infernal machine," said BARKER. " How terrible," said Miss Mellow. " What did it look like?" " Like any other hand organ."

" TOMMY, can you give me a sentence in which 'but' is a conjunction?" asked the teacher. " See the goat but the boy. 'But' is a conjunction, and connects the boy with the goat."

LAWYER (sharply) : " How is it that you know this watch has been in your family thirty years, and yet cannot remember your age?" WITNESS (duly) : " Oh, sir, the watch has kept time; I have not."

AN EMINENT barrister, having a preposterous case sent to him for his opinion, replied in answer to the question, " Would an action lie?" " Yes, if the witnesses would lie too, but not otherwise."

WHEN a man begins to impart information with the remark that " it is not generally known," it is pretty safe to infer that it was not known to himself until he found it in the encyclopaedia an hour or two ago.

" Are you the master of this house?" asked a stranger, addressing the young married man. " No," said the young married man, with a deep sigh; " my wife has just taken the master up stairs to nurse him."

ARTIST : " Why have you hung my picture so high?" MEMBER OF COMMITTEE : " To get the light on it." ARTIST : " What light do you get there?" MEMBER OF COMMITTEE : " The skylight."

STUFFER (at the end of the Simpkins ball) : " Do you know, I can't find my overcoat anywhere." SIMPKINS : " Have you looked in the refreshment room?" STUFFER : " Why, no. How could it be in there?" SIMPKINS : " You haven't been anywhere else during the evening, have you?"

FATHER (examining Mabel's engagement ring) : " Yes, it's a pretty ring, darling; I hope it is a real diamond." MABEL : " I am sure it is, dad. Harry hasn't taken me to the theatre or sent me any sweets since he gave it me."

A VAIN quest. MRS. BINGO : " What are you going to wear at the sociable to-night, my dear?" BINGO (frantically from the depths of his ward robe) : " From present indications I shall go in a silk hat and a pair of rubber boots."

THE PIN manufacturers of the United States turn out 18,000,000,000 pins annually, and all a man has to do is to put his arm around the waist of the first young woman who happens along and he'll find the whole output, or hell be led to believe he has.

" MY DEAR, will you please explain how your new cloak came to be set down among the household expenses?" " Why, darling, you are certainly not going to deny that it is mantle pieces? And you know you told me to get one."

A SUCCESSFUL competitor for the prize in a foot race made this graceful temperance speech in accepting it. " Gentlemen, I have won this cup by the use of my legs. I trust that I may never lose the use of my legs by the use of this cup."

PHOTOGRAPHER : " Raise the chin a little, please." VICTIM : " Am I all right otherwise?" " Yes." " Just want the chin a little higher?" " Yes. That's all." " Anything to accommodate you." (Takes out his false teeth, closes his mouth, and his chin comes up to his nose.)

" WELL, I never!" exclaimed MRS. SNAGGS. " You never what?" inquired her husband. " Here's a piece in the paper that says it is possible to become intoxicated on rarefied air. Did you ever hear of such a thing?" " Of course I have. The expression 'air tight' obtained its origin from just that fact."

HUSBAND (just home from city) : " My angel, what is the matter with you? What are you crying for?" WIFE : " They have awarded me (sobbing) the prize medal for my sponge cake." HUSBAND : " And I am quite sure you deserve—" WIFE (hysterically) : " Oh, but they said it was for the best specimen of concrete."

TAXPAYER : " That's a very firm and solid piece of paving you're doing there Patrick." CITY EMPLOYEE : " Indeed, an it's a foine pace of work, and mighty glad am Oi to see it." T. P. : " Why, does it make any difference with you, Patrick?" C. E. : " Incads and it does. It will give us double the job a-pillin'it up."

" YES" said Fogg, " I've suffered I can't begin to tell you how much from the advice which has been thrust upon me for my rheumatism. I've had all sorts of liniments and lotions recommended to me, not to mention electric rings and bells. One man has advised me to dress warm with plenty of flannels, while another has told me to leave off overcoat and under-flannels. The other day a fellow came in and told me that all I required was exercise." " Yes? and you—" " I took him at his word, and kicked him down stairs. And, if you'll believe it, I've felt better ever since."

" CHILDREN ask a great many more questions than we can answer," remarked the school-teacher the other evening. " There's a boy, for instance, in my school to whom I have been trying to teach the alphabet, but he is very slow to learn. The other day when I had him up, he persisted in calling F S, and at last, provoked by his stupidity, I said to him, ' Now you've called F S a half-dozen times, and I don't wan't you to do it again. F isn't S, never was and never will be.' ' Why ain't it?' he asked, innocently, and to this day I am unable to answer that question entirely to my own satisfaction, and certainly not to the boy's."

SOCIETY.

The Persians have a different name for every day in the month.

THERE are about four yards of very close sewing in a ladies' ten button glove.

The first establishment of a letter post in England by the Government was in the reign of James I., who organized a post for foreign letters.

An authority on such matters says the face should always be wiped upwards. The towel should be used from the chin to the forehead, and outward towards the ears.

The double-florin's doom is not settled yet, though there has been talk of it; so the poor clumsy coin, whose only fault is that of resembling the five-shilling piece too closely, still circulates.

THE King of Bavaria is again desperately ill, and may die at any moment. In consequence of this, Prince Rupert, the grandson of the Prince Regent Louis, has given up his projected journey round the world.

Sheep have two teeth in the centre of the jaw at one year, and add two each year until five years old, when they have a "full mouth." After that time the age cannot be told by the teeth.

The manuscript of a small volume of poems was left by Lord Lytton to be edited by his daughter and son-in-law. They will shortly be published with a short preface by Lady Lytton, and will be followed by Lord Lytton's "King Poppy," on which he had been engaged for many years.

In regard to the Prussian Royal Family there is an excellent law, which, had it existed here would have saved us much money. No Royal prince is allowed to borrow, and no one is allowed to lend money to him. If anyone does lend, he cannot recover.

A most original idea among wedding novelties, emanating from France, is a plan of lining the carriage for the newly-married pair with rare orchids, roses, and white lilies, until they look as if they were seated in the heart of a wedding bouquet.

The Countess of Aberdeen has opened a hospital at Glasgow which will be for women only, and to be attended by qualified medical practitioners of their own sex. It will be curious to note whether or not a large proportion will attend that hospital in order to show confidence in sisters as doctors.

The Empress Frederick and the Emperor William are both very anxious to marry Prince George of Wales to Princess Margaret of Prussia, and such an alliance would meet with general approval. Princess Margaret is bright and accomplished, intelligent, and very fond of England and of the English manner of life. The Princess was born in April 1872.

In Paris the women are using an odd looking mat for almost every conceivable purpose. They hang it up in their wardrobe; they put it in their bureau drawers, and they use it in place of a splashier. The mats are about three feet square, and are made of long strips of a root called *vertivert*. The perfume is most delicately fragrant.

The introduction of the nose-ring is advocated by a certain professor of female beauty. She insists that it would be a certain cure for any unbecoming redness of the prominent feature. The central cartilage is to be the receptacle of the ring, and the process of boring the same as that used for the ears. The latter are dragged into the question as illustrations, for the *Femme assante* insists that pierced ears are whiter than those which are not pierced. The simplest plan would be to experiment on two or three red noses with the consent of their owners, and try the result.

STATISTICS.

One person in four in Whitechapel is a Jew or Jewess.

The average camel will travel eight hundred miles in eight days.

The pendulum was first attached to the clock in 1656, by Huyghen.

It takes eighteen times the strength to go upstairs that is required for the same distance on a level.

By recent Census in Scotland it was discovered that only 231,632 persons, or one in every seventeen of the population, could speak Gaelic.

GEMS.

WHERE the sunshine does not enter the doctor must.

DISTRUSTING everybody is a good way to have the friendship of nobody.

CALAMITIES that seem insupportable when looked at from a distance lose half their power if met and resisted with fortitude.

THESE two things, contradictory as they may seem, must go together: manly dependence, and manly independence, manly reliance and manly self-reliance.

BLESSEDNESS may appear under the shape of pains, losses and disappointments, but let him have patience and he will see them in their proper figure.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

TO TELL GOOD EGGS.—Put them in water; if the large ends turn up they are not fresh. This is an infallible rule to distinguish a good egg from a bad one.

SPIRITS.—Cut a French or Vienna roll (stale) into slices, remove the crusts and dip the slices in milk, pass them through beaten egg, and fry in boiling fat or butter; drain well, pile them on a very hot dish, strew fine sugar over them, and serve with any preserve or stewed fruit.

FRIDED POTATOES.—Slice some good-sized potatoes, if possible with a machine, and put in cold water for an hour; then dry in a cloth, and fry in clean boiling fat; when soft, take them out, and heat the fat again, and then plunge the potatoes in to crisp them; sprinkle a little salt and finely-chopped parsley over them, and dish in a pile.

SPANISH FRITTERS.—Cut the soft part of bakers' bread in slices a quarter of an inch thick, and of any form you choose. Take a pint of milk or cream, three well-beaten eggs, half a teaspoonful of nutmeg and cinnamon mixed, three drops of the essence of lemon, and sugar to the taste; stir all well together, and pour over the pieces of bread. When they have absorbed as much of the milk as they will, take them out before they get too soft, and fry them of a nice light brown on both sides. They may be served with or without sweet sauce.

PICCALILLY.—One pound of ginger, one pound of garlic, one pound of black pepper, one pound of mustard seed, three quarters of an ounce of turmeric, a little cayenne pepper, one quart of vinegar. Take the ginger and let it lie in salt and water one night, then cut it in thin slices; divide the garlic and salt it three days, then wash and dry it on a sieve; bruise the turmeric very fine, and put it in the mustard and pepper and cayenne in a jar, with the vinegar boiled and poured over them; then put in the ginger and all the other things. Let it stand for a fortnight. Let the jar be quite full, and stop it down. In six weeks it will be ready for use.

MISCELLANEOUS.

ASTRONOMERS say that the sun is not so cold as the earth.

ALEXANDRIA has the largest artificial harbour in the world.

MOST of our walking sticks come from the Channel Islands.

NATURALISTS have enumerated 657 different species of reptiles. Of this number, 400 are as harmless as rabbits.

THE first suspension bridges ever built were made in China two thousand years ago, being constructed of iron chains.

A BRITISH army officer has invented a rifle which a cavalry man may discharge by means of a little dynamo in his saddle.

THERE are more women in British India than there are men women and children in Great Britain, France, and Germany.

A RUMMETER, to record the number of a horse's paces, and the distance he has travelled, has been invented by an officer in the French army.

THE inherent hue of water is said to be blueness. Distilled water has been shown to be almost exactly of the same tint as a solution of Prussian blue.

GREAT BRITAIN has a longer seacoast line than any other nation in Europe—2,755 miles—with Italy second, 2,472 miles. Russia stands third and France fourth.

THE drinking of salt water is said to be a perfect cure for seasickness, though it makes the drinker very miserable for a few minutes after he takes the cure.

WATER TAR is a recent invention. It will not become soft under the sun's rays in any climate, and is expected to be used largely in caulking the decks of yachts.

THE dolphin is the fastest swimmer in the sea. It can with ease swim around and about a vessel going at the highest rate of speed, and can go faster than twenty miles an hour.

A FRENCH anatomist has examined the skeletons of eighty-six chimpanzees, gorillas, and orang-outangs, and asserts that he has found in them bone diseases like those which afflict mankind, and in about the same proportion.

THE French baker is not only required to conform to laws regarding weight, but he is also told at what price he must sell his bread. He is further required to deposit a certain sum of money in the hands of the municipal authorities as a surety of good behaviour. In the large fortified cities he has to keep a specified quantity on hand to provide for war-like emergencies.

IN PRUSSIA, on the banks of the Rhine, a correspondent of a scientific journal states that singing mice are common, both indoors and in fields and gardens. The sound they make is said to vary from a soft "cheep-cheep" to the whirring noise of an over-wound spring, and it is frequent, but of course it ceases while they are eating. These mice are both bold and cheerful, appearing in no way sickly.

ASCERTAINED facts seem to show us that by the lower forms of animal life very little pain, as we understand the word, can be felt at all. Lobsters, for instance, will voluntarily deprive themselves of their great claws if suddenly alarmed by some such sound as that caused by the firing of heavy guns above them. A crab, seized while feeding by a greater and a stronger, will continue its meal while being itself devoured. A fish, torn and mangled by the hook, will return in a moment or two to the bait, with its appetite unimpaired. A blind-worm or a sand lizard, if unexpectedly seized, will snap its body in twain, and glide away, none the worse for the mutilation, to reproduce the severed substance. It is hard, indeed, in cases such as these, to insist that pain, in our sense of the term, can be in any real degree endured.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

PIPER.—All the Highland regiments have pipers.

R. R.—Sir Charles Russell is a Roman Catholic.

L. S.—We would recommend you to have your skins dressed by a professional hand.

A. H. J.—You had better apply to the prison you wish to enter, and they will give you all particulars.

MUSIC.—It is entirely a matter of opinion. Only a musical person would be competent to judge.

KITTY.—Belvoir (Castle) is correctly pronounced "Beover."

TAX.—The population of Manchester at the last census was 557,348.

JIM.—Lancers, 5 feet 7 inches high; drivers Royal Artillery, 5 feet 4 inches.

THE LAIRD O'COOPER.—We are not ourselves able to give you the information required.

MAG.—Marriage with a deceased wife's sister is not legal in this country.

AULD ROBIN GAY.—It born in January, 1832, are 69 years old now, and have entered on their 61st year.

L. R.—It is not essential that a county court summons should be personally served.

GAMBLER.—Apply to the Emigrants' Information Office, 81, Broadway, London, S.W.

F. F. D.—An executor is legally bound to see the provision of a will faithfully carried out.

NED.—You may remove any fixtures belonging to you which are not built into the freehold.

E. F.—Except the goods of a lodger, everything found in a house is distrinable for the rent.

LUCILLE.—To see a crest you must have a license, costing a guinea, obtainable at the Inland Revenue Office.

CONSTANT READER.—In all cases of domestic service a month's notice on either side is usual, unless there was a special agreement to the contrary.

WORTH RUDDOCK.—You can only claim your month's wages. No lady is obliged to give a character unless she likes.

INDIGATION.—If it is proved that the article was stolen the magistrates can order the pawnbroker to give it up.

T. O.—There's no record of such dates. Some person on the spot might get the date by personal inquiry among rowing people.

REGULAR READER.—You had better apply at the Probate Registry at Lichfield, and failing that at Somerset House.

ANXIOUS FRED.—A son at eighteen, if in health, may be required to provide a home for himself apart from his parents.

WILLIAM TELL.—Switzerland has a standing army, on a war footing, of 200,255, and a reserve of 262,766 in addition.

COMPOSER.—There is no fee payable on publishing a song, beyond the trade expenses, unless you have it copyrighted.

MOLLY DARLING.—Everything in the father's house is presumed to be his property unless the contrary can be proved.

A BAD MEMORY.—The Duke of Albany died at Cannes, March 28, 1834. The immediate cause of death was a fall on the stairs.

RUDOLPH.—The signature of a testator may be witnessed by any person competent to give evidence of the fact if necessary.

POURLED.—The Duke of Fife married a daughter of the Prince of Wales; hence the Duke must be son-in-law to the Prince.

IN SOME TROUBLE.—If a woman refuses to live with her husband on account of ill-treatment she had better apply for a separation order.

DEVOTED READER.—The Princess Victoria Mary, known as the Princess May, is the daughter of the Duchess of Teck, the Queen's cousin.

SWEET SEVENTEEN.—For all information as to marriage licences apply to the clergyman of your parish, or to the district registrar.

T. B.—Better go in to New York in April, and ascertain at the Government Labour Bureau there where your trade is most brisk at the moment.

MAGPIE.—Mr. Gladstone, after private tuition, graduated at Christ Church, Oxford. Lord Beaconsfield was privately educated.

A GOOD DRAUGHT PLAYER.—There is no harm in persons playing draughts or similar games in a public-house, but there must be no betting on the result.

SWEET WILLIAM.—Cousins of any degree may legally marry. The late Prince and Princess Mary Victoria of Teck were distant cousins.

SAMSON.—There is sometimes more real courage shown in refusing to fight than in fighting. Discretion is at all times the better part of valour.

GRANIER.—As the younger son of a duke the Right Hon. Lord John Harry is entitled, by courtesy, to be addressed as "Lord" Randolph Churchill.

TADDY.—We have not the least idea where you would be likely to find a purchaser. Curiously hunters have no recognised meeting place or locality.

A. T. C.—A promissory note is payable according to its tenor. If a definite time is fixed, payment must be claimed at the expiration of that time.

MOGS.—The witnesses to a will are merely witnesses to the signature of the testator; and they need know nothing about the contents of the will.

X. Y. Z.—We are not aware of a Hunter's River in Australia. There is Hunter's Hill, Sydney, New South Wales. That may be the locality you refer to.

H. H.—The word "public-house" is properly applied to a fully-licensed house, and not to one licensed for the sale of drink to be consumed off the premises.

BRUNNIE.—1. You will not be permitted to transfer from a cavalry to an infantry regiment. 2. The Nineteenth Hussars have six honours, four of these gathered in the recent Egyptian campaign.

PARTRICK.—Go back to the first chapter of Genesis and you will get the explanation—"and the evening and the morning were the first day." The "eve" is the night before the day.

L. P.—You must get someone to write to Paymaster-General, Pay Office, Whitehall, London, stating the facts; but it will be necessary to have your son's number as well as his name.

ANXIOUS TO LEARN.—Good manners are acquired by a never-ceasing desire to please, and on no account to give offence. Much may be gained from example, very little from books.

LOSING AND LIVING.

FORVERA THE sun is pouring his gold
On a hundred worlds that beg and borrow;
His warmth he squanders on summits cold,
His wealth on the homes of want and sorrow;

T, withhold his largess of precious light
Is to bury himself in eternal night.

To give
Is to live.

The flower shines not for itself at all;
Its joy is the joy it freely diffuses;

Of beauty and balm it is prodigal,

And it lives in the light it freely loses;

It cherishes the rose but giveth or doth,

To exhale or smother, to wither or bloom.

To deny
Is to die.

The sea sends silvery rain to the land,
The land its sapphire-streams to the ocean;

The heart sends blood to the brain's command;

The brain to the heart its lightning motion;

And ever and ever we yield our breath,

Till the mirror is dry and images death.

To give
Is to live.

He is dead whose hand is not opened wide
To help the need of a human brother;

He doubles the length of his life-long ride

Who gives his fortune's piece to another;

And a thousand million lives are his

Who carries the world in his sympathies.

To deny
Is to die.

WORRIED.—A married woman may carry on business in her own name, and if she can show the property is her own, and not her husband's, it cannot be seized for the husband's debts.

COSETTE.—A green-room is the retiring room of actors in a theatre—the place where the actors and actresses all go when they quit the stage from time to time during a play.

ASPIRANT.—There is no such office as that of public hangman. The responsibility of engaging a hangman with the high sheriff of the county in which the execution is to take place.

V. G.—The Victoria Cross was instituted to reward the gallantry of persons of all ranks in the British Army and Navy. It is a Maltese cross made of Russian cannon from Sebastopol. It was instituted in 1855.

A NEW BACON.—To remove iron dots, wet the goods in clear water and rub with ripe tomatoes. Place in the sun; when almost dry, if the rust is not removed, repeat the process.

ARLINE.—People of Royal rank have no surnames. The Queen's full name is Alexandra Victoria, nothing more. Prince Albert's was Francis Albert Augustus Charles Emanuel, Prince of Saxe-Coburg.

ART.—Including artists, art students, and all engaged in the artistic branches of engraving and interior decoration, there are said to be forty thousand persons who follow art in Paris.

C. O. R.—Religious statistics are all more or less mere estimates. Thus it is estimated that there are 175,000,000 Roman Catholics and 110,000,000 Protestants in the world; of Buddhists and Brahmins again there are over 600,000,000.

A SOLDIER'S LAMENT.—"Not a drum was heard, not a funeral note," was written by R. W. Chas. Wolfe, of Dublin, who had read the account of Moore's death in the Edinburgh Register, and his request to be buried where he fell in the event of his being killed in battle.

R. P. S.—I. The Post Office Savings Bank limit is £100, but when a depositor has assessed that sum he can transfer it to Government Consols, receiving better interest than in bank, then go on to deposit another £100. 2. Two shillings and sixpence, the third of 7s. 6d.

VIVACITY.—The climate of Colorado is characterised by great heat, absence of rain, and moisture, and darkness nights during summer; with mid-winter snow sometimes falling towards the beginning of the spring. Pulmonary or chest complaints are scarcely known within the borders of the State.

GRACE.—The morganatic marriage is a German institution, so-called from Morganabé, the gift made of a limited part of his property to a bride by her husband on the morning after her marriage. In such a union the bridegroom gives his left hand to the bride, in token that she is neither to take his rank nor his property except in so far as he chooses to dowry her with either.

HAPPY-GO-LUCKY.—We are afraid we cannot undertake to answer your questions in such a way as to make you comprehend clearly what you wish to know, it is a kind of information that you must live into. There is no book on the subject. The log is the captain's diary of the voyage. "All told" means everything taken into account. If the phrase applies to the crew, it includes every soul on board from the captain to the cook's scullion.

A. B. C.—The Phenicians are generally credited with the invention of the alphabet from which ours is derived, through the Latin, and, earlier, the Greek. The ancient Egyptian and the Chinese collections of hieroglyphics and detached characters are older than the Phenician alphabet, but are too doubtful and void of system to be considered as based on an alphabet. The word "alphabet" is derived from the names, "alpha" and "beta," of the first two letters of the Greek alphabet.

A SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHER.—Luther established Sunday-schools in Wittenburg in 1517 for the instruction of children who could not attend the day-schools. Knox inaugurated them in Scotland in 1560. In Milan in 1580 archbishop Borromeo established throughout his diocese a system of Sunday-schools, and about the same period there were similar schools started in France and the Netherlands. In England in the seven-teenth century the clergy in some parishes statedly catechised the children, and a regular Sunday-school was opened in 1665. There was a Sunday-school in Roxbury, Mass., in 1674, and one in Plymouth, Mass., in 1689. Modern Sunday-schools were originated by Robert Raikes, who in 1781 gathered poor children from the streets in Gloucester, England, and employed female teachers at a shilling a day for their instruction.

LA BELLE.—The habit of eating arsenic, once common, cannot be broken off. A person is to be looked as idiotic who will deliberately adopt the practice of taking such an injurious and dangerous drug, merely for the purpose of whitening the skin. But there are other substances much more commonly used than arsenic, for their effect on the complexion, which are also highly deleterious. Many of the cosmetics which are sold contain lead, and there are few poisons which produce results more to be dreaded than those occasioned by lead. Of all known forms of disease, some of the most frightful are caused by lead. Even as used in some hair-dyes, it occasions neuralgia, paralysis, suffering and death. Seek good looks by seeking good health; by early rising, out-door exercise, wholesome food, a clear conscience and the cultivation of a cheerful temper; and not by the use of arsenic or any other poison.

ANXIOUS TO KNOW.—There is no electricity about the phonograph, which consists of a mouthpiece something like a pianist's "filler," closed at its lower end, and with an elastic membrane having a small steel point in its centre; this mouthpiece is placed membrane-end downwards over a cylinder round which a thin sheet of tinfoil is wrapped. The cylinder being set in motion by clockwork, the operator speaks into the "filler"; his voice causes the membrane to vibrate, and the vibration causes the steel point to touch and print the tintinn on the cylinder goes slowly along its spiral as it turns round under the printer, and in this way it is gradually covered with lines of dots like thread. The cylinder being stopped the cylinder is put back on its spindle to the point at which it is started, the clock-work is set more slowly going, and now the dots on the tintinn touch the steel point and cause the elastic membrane to vibrate in such a way as to give off the very words or sounds that made the dots. That is a familiar explanation of a very curious instrument.

THE LONDON READER, POST-FREE, THREE-HAPENCHE WEEKLY; OR QUARTERLY ONE SHILLING AND EIGHTPENCE.

ALL BACK NUMBERS, PARTS AND VOLUMES are in print, and may be had of all booksellers.

NOTICE.—Part 264, Now Ready, price Sixpence, post-free. Eightpence. Also Vol. LVII., bound in cloth, 4s. 6d.

57. ALL LETTERS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR THE LONDON READER, 234, STRAND, W.C.

58. WE CANNOT UNDERTAKE TO RETURN REJECTED MANUSCRIPTS.

LONDON: Published for the Proprietor, as 234, Strand, and F. G. Cornforth; and Printed by Woodfall and Kenders, 70 to 76, Long Acre, W.C.